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THE RECOVERY OF THE WEST

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*by the same author*

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THE MODERN MIND

T. E. HULME

ORION MARCHES

*edited by the same author*

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THE FABER BOOK OF MODERN VERSE

# THE RECOVERY OF THE WEST

by  
MICHAEL ROBERTS

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## PREFACE

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To generalize about the state of mind of a nation or a civilization is difficult. At all times there are intricate currents and counter-currents, and a tide that is receding at one point may be advancing at another. It is with a proper sense of these intricacies that I say that during the past twenty years or more there has been, especially among the young, a strong feeling that Western civilization is in decay, that its institutions are antiquated and corrupt, and that nothing short of a cataclysmic revolution can restore it to health. To say all this to people engaged in desperate war may well seem disheartening and depressing; but if the pessimistic arguments are sound, it is useless to ignore them, and if they are false, they deserve to be refuted. The purpose of this book is to examine the apparent symptoms of decay, and to ask to what extent they are really marks of decadence, to what extent they are inseparable from our industrial civilization, and to what extent they spring from errors that can be corrected. To prevent misunderstanding, I may say at once that when I came to survey the evidence, I found the symptoms at once more widespread and less ominous than I expected.

## PREFACE

The book was planned, and its main conclusions reached, some time before the outbreak of the present war; and although the events of the past eighteen months have delayed and interrupted the writing, they have neither revealed any new facts nor suggested any new arguments. War is a solvent and a social catalyst: it accelerates inevitable changes, and compels us to recognize weaknesses that could be more easily ignored in time of peace; but it initiates nothing new. Indeed, the belief that the Western democracies were in decline, and that democracy is a weak and suicidal form of government, was itself one of the causes of the war. To the German Nazi and the Italian Fascist, it seemed obvious that France and Britain, as well as the lesser democracies and probably the United States, were already in decay. Their birth-rates were rapidly declining, they showed no readiness to grapple with the economic problems of the age, their missionary zeal for liberty, equality and social justice had evaporated into sectarian selfishness, and they were unwilling to defend their own material interests. Nor was this view confined to the totalitarian States: the best that one American commentator could find to say for the democracies in 1938 was that Britain probably had just one more great war left in her. To many well-informed Germans it must have seemed that war was a safe gamble: one had only to shake the tree, and the fruit would fall; and even if the first attempt were unsuccessful, it would only be necessary to wait a few more years for the apples to ripen.

Since the collapse of France, it has become impossible for anyone to maintain that the disease is an illusion, a mere fad of a few critics and philosophers. If we look beneath the surface we find the signs of weakness not only in Great Britain and in France, but also in America and in the totalitarian countries themselves. In its blundering and

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brutal way, the Nazi revolution was an attempt to deal with the problem—an attempt only partially and temporarily successful, and successful at an appalling price. The methods of our own society are different, and there is no reason to be pessimistic. If we look deep enough, we find the disease already correcting itself, the toxin generating the anti-toxin; and in the long run the slower and more thorough method may prove the better.

But it is useless to discuss the prospects of recovery if at the back of one's mind there is the feeling that the white races are steadily moving towards extinction; and for that reason I have given up the first chapter of this book to a discussion of the birth-rate. To those readers who dislike statistics, I must apologize for interposing this preliminary hurdle between them and the main body of the book. I make no extravagant claims for the relation that I have traced (on pp. 23 and 24) between population and real wages; but any relation of this kind is a useful reminder that we cannot predict the future growth of population by considering population statistics alone; and once we get rid of the notion of some mysterious and irresistible force driving the birth-rate lower and lower it becomes possible to consider the future with an open mind.

The first chapter is therefore necessary to my main purpose, which is to discuss the signs of moral and intellectual decay. The loss of social confidence and alertness in recent times has been bound up with the rapid growth of a mass mentality that looks for passive amusement and avoids responsibility; and on a different intellectual level it has been connected with doctrines that attack first religion, then morality and art, in the name of progress and exact knowledge, and in so doing destroy any sense of the value and purpose of life. I have tried to deal with these matters

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in order, first describing the symptoms in our political, moral, and intellectual life, then trying to find some of the errors in our way of thought, and finally, while bearing in mind our political and economic difficulties (with which I am not directly concerned), attempting to describe an outlook that would be more realistic and more healthy. Some of the conclusions about authority, responsibility, and religion, to which I find myself forced, may be unwelcome to those who are accustomed to think of themselves as progressive—though perhaps less unwelcome than they would have been a year or two ago—but I hope that such readers will at least agree that something more than an ambitious programme of social reform is needed if our society is permanently to regain its confidence and energy.

In time of war, and in the years of reconstruction that will follow the war, the forces of disintegration are likely to be concealed, unless they are already overwhelming. But although a great emergency calls up reserves of energy, and helps to revive old loyalties and half-forgotten certainties, it does not cure the disease itself. In the years that follow, the problems of sophisticated doubt, of exaggerated hope and cynical or baffled disillusion, will reappear, and they will be intensified by the demands of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and factory-workers who will once again want relaxation from tension and responsibility. At such a time, questions that are now remote and theoretical will be practical and urgent, and it may be easier to deal with them if we give them some of our attention now.

## *Chapter 1*

### THE FALLING BIRTH-RATE

#### *The First American Settlers*

The Icelandic settlements in Greenland were established in A.D. 986, and for over four hundred years there were continuous records of their religion and of their trade with Norway and with England. At first the colonists were prosperous and healthy; later, for no known reason, their prosperity declined and their trade ceased. The last recorded voyage to the colony was in 1442, and even before that time it was reported that the northern farms were abandoned. 'In 1586 John Davis found a burial place of men who were dressed in skins, and whose only sign of European contact was the cross laid on the grave.'

Neither war nor disease nor a change in climate will account for the failure of that first American colonization. Perhaps the settlers never made themselves fully at home in their new country; they lived as outposts of another and greater world, and when communication was cut off their own life had no vitality, no power of total adaptation. At the end, only the symbol of the cross remained; and if a few stragglers intermarried with the Eskimos they bequeathed to their children no memory of their own language, and

## THE FALLING BIRTH-RATE

nothing of the arts that should have made them equals or superiors of the older race. When Hans Egede went out in 1721 to look for some mark of the vanished colonies he saw among the dark-skinned Eskimos the fair hair and blue eyes of his own people, but nothing to prove that these were the signs he sought.

It is a sad story, and one that has been repeated many times and on a far greater scale. It touches us closely, because our own people, the people of north-west Europe, are involved; it touches us still more closely because the same thing may be happening to ourselves today. Our wars, our loss of confidence, our failure to realize the hopes that were built on nineteenth-century progress; all these, together with our political and intellectual confusion, are symptoms of a social malady infecting not only France and England, but also the whole of Western Europe and the European nations overseas. In all these countries the birth-rate is declining, and the decline is all the more disturbing in that it seems to be based on a profound conviction that life is not worth living.

### *Expansion in the Nineteenth Century*

Through the greater part of the nineteenth century no-one seriously believed that Western civilization was in danger. Then, as always, there were prophets of more limited disaster. Critics like Arnold, Ruskin, Bagehot and Carlyle pointed with gloomy apprehension to the dangers of an un-educated democracy and a philistine commercialism. Karl Marx, with comparative cheerfulness, predicted the collapse of capitalism. In spite of these prognostications, the dominant attitude was one of liberal optimism: reforms might be needed, but they would come in time; some virtues of the old social order might be vanishing, but the loss

## EXPANSION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

was more than counterbalanced by the steady gains in scientific knowledge and the general improvement in conduct, comfort and education.

For all its lively self-criticism, the nineteenth century was an age of confidence and enthusiasm, of territorial expansion and rising prosperity. In England real wages were nearly doubled between 1840 and 1900, the working day was shortened, and child labour was practically abolished. Engineering and medicine advanced at a pace never before dreamed of, education was thrown open to all, and the standard of civil conduct improved out of all recognition. However much we deplore the poverty and suffering that have persisted to our time, we cannot deny that the enthusiasm and confidence of the Victorian age were justified. Nor can we doubt the vitality and health of nations that set out to explore and colonize the great undeveloped areas of the world. During the century, the combined population of England, France, and the United States was trebled, and by 1920 there were more white people in the British overseas Dominions than there had been a century before in the United Kingdom and the Colonies combined.

POPULATION IN MILLIONS<sup>1</sup>

	1820	1840	1860	1880	1900	1920	1940
United States	9·6	17·1	31·4	50·2	76·0	105·7	131·4
Great Britain	14·0	18·6	23·6	29·7	37·0	42·8	46·4
France	31·2	34·9	37·4	39·2	40·7	39·2	42·0
Germany	25·4	32·8	38·1	43·6	54·5	62·1	69·5
Italy	19·7	22·0	25·0	28·5	32·5	38·0	44·5
Total	99·9	125·4	155·5	191·2	240·7	287·8	333·8

<sup>1</sup> The areas considered are the 1937 territories, excluding dependencies. Thus Alsace, Lorraine and Savoy are included in France. Where possible, the figures are derived from census returns, and for Great Britain, France and Italy these are one year later than the dates at the head of each column. Where no census returns are available, the estimates have

## THE FALLING BIRTH-RATE

The striking increase in population, which began in England about 1750 and gradually spread to other countries, was not wholly unprecedented (there had been a similar increase in England after the Norman Conquest), but it alarmed the economists of the early nineteenth century. They were deeply impressed by the teaching of Malthus, who had argued that population always tended to multiply faster than subsistence, so that poverty was inevitable unless mankind deliberately set itself to check the increase of the race. This argument was reinforced by the economic teaching of Ricardo, which gave the impression that the world of commerce and industry was influenced by no motive except self-interest, so that wages and profits were decided by the sheer power of competition, and wages necessarily gravitated towards the barest subsistence.

From these doctrines the rich learned an economic fatalism that not only relieved them of all responsibility but also encouraged them to think that an increasing population was an unmitigated evil. The economists themselves, ignoring the combination of mechanical invention and colonization by which England became a workshop drawing supplies from overseas, argued that the yield per worker must decline with any increase in population beyond a figure depending on the natural resources of the land. By 1840 they were convinced that England was already near the point at which this law of diminishing returns would begin to operate. John Stuart Mill, for example, looked forward with dread to any marked increase in population: 'Little improvement can be expected in morality until the produc-

been taken from Huber, Bunle and Boverat: *La Population de la France*, and from Thompson and Whelpton, *Population Trends in the United States*. The same sources together with the *Statistical Year-Book of the League of Nations*, 1939/40, have supplied most of the data for the other tables in this chapter.

## THE END OF EXPANSION

ing of large families is regarded with the same feelings as overindulgence for wine, or any other physical excess. But while the aristocracy and clergy are foremost to set the example of incontinence, what can be expected of the poor?"

### *The End of Expansion*

This view was evidently widely shared, for although populations continued to rise, the rate of increase was halved. The change began among the more educated classes, but soon it spread to all classes, and it was not confined to any one country. In France, between 1890 and 1913, there were seven years in which there were more deaths than births; and although immigration was large enough to maintain the population, deaths again exceeded births in nine of the years between 1914 and 1936. By 1931, 7 per cent of the people living in France were natives of Belgium, Italy, Poland, Spain, or Switzerland. In the same way, immigration from Europe helped to conceal a sharp decrease in American fertility; and the birth-rate statistics show that Italy and Germany soon began to follow the example of France, Britain and the U.S.A.

ANNUAL BIRTH-RATE PER THOUSAND

	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930
United States	35.2	31.5	30.1	27.4	23.7	18.9
Great Britain	34.1	30.2	28.8	25.2	25.6	16.8
France	25.2	23.1	21.4	19.7	21.4	18.0
Germany	37.7	36.5	36.0	29.8	25.9	17.5
Italy	33.6	37.5	33.0	32.9	31.8	26.7

This sudden decrease does not necessarily mean that native-born populations must decline. If the average expectation of life at birth could be raised to seventy years, a birth-rate of 15 per 1,000 would be enough to maintain a steady population. In 1937 the expectation of life was little

## THE FALLING BIRTH-RATE

over sixty in England, Germany and America, and rather less in France and Italy. But an increase in the expectation of life raises the average age of the community, and therefore lowers the proportion of women of child-bearing age. Furthermore, owing to the decrease in the birth-rate in the past thirty years, the number of women who reach child-bearing age is becoming smaller each year, so that the present birth-rate is likely to fall even lower. If we are to estimate the size of the future population, it is safer to use the net reproduction rate, which is a measure of the number of female children who will, if present rates of fertility and mortality continue, be borne by every newly-born girl before she dies. A net reproduction rate of 1·00 would mean that the population was exactly replacing itself.

In Great Britain, the net reproduction rate in 1935 was 0·77; in France it was 0·87; and in the United States it was 0·94. A low record of 0·70 was reached in Germany in 1933, but two years later the figure had risen to 0·90. The Italian rate in 1935 was 1·24, and in that year the only other European countries with a net reproduction rate greater than 1·00 were Holland, Éire, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Spain, Portugal, and Russia. Even in these countries, the birth-rate and the net reproduction rate are falling rapidly: thus between 1880 and 1935 the average birth-rate for Yugoslavia, Poland, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary fell from something over 40·0 to something under 30·0. It seems that in population as in other things, the backward countries are following the more 'progressive'.

In recent years, statisticians have done much to bring home the consequences of this movement to the general public. Thus, Dr. Enid Charles, in 1935, calculated that if fertility and mortality continued to fall as suggested by the experience of the preceding ten years, the population of

## THE CAUSES OF THIS DECLINE

England and Wales would fall to 31·4 millions by 1975 and to 4·43 millions by 2035. Similar calculations have been made for the United States and for other countries. In every case (including European Russia) the conclusion is the same: the white races are rapidly moving towards extermination.

### *'The Causes of this Decline'*

It is sometimes asserted that this dramatic change in the trend of population is due to modern methods of contraception; and it is true that the decline in the British birth-rate first became noticeable when Charles Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant began to spread knowledge of birth-control. In Australia, too, the decline became marked after a prosecution that involved great publicity. To argue, however, that the decline is the result of the knowledge of birth-control is to confuse cause and means. If people possess the means of doing something, a few of them will always do it; but we have to account not for a slight decrease here and there, but for an enormous and general decrease of fertility. To say that the invention of cheap, effective methods of contraception wholly accounts for the declining birth-rate is to assume that people have never wanted to have more than one or two children. This assumption implies that the human race has always wanted to put an end to its own existence, and has at last found out the best and quickest way.

Contraception is a means, not a cause. The spread of contraceptive knowledge explains the speed of the decline, but it does not explain the decline itself. For thousands of years the race has already had the means to end itself if it really wished. Most of the primitive races whose history is known have always killed two-thirds of their poten-

## THE FALLING BIRTH-RATE

tial offspring by abortion or infanticide; and it would always have been easy for them to increase that proportion by means consistent with their knowledge and their general moral outlook. There is no doubt that contraceptive methods, together with late marriage, have been the means through which the birth-rate has been reduced; but the question is, why have people wished to have only a small family or no family at all?

In the years between the depression of 1931 and the war of 1939, people who were asked why they did not have more children often answered with the self-justifying assertion that it was a crime to bring children into a world of recurrent war and unemployment. No doubt this answer was given in all good faith, but it does not explain why the decline began as long ago as 1870 nor why it has been most marked in the most prosperous countries. Above all, it does not explain why the Australian birth-rate fell from 42·5 per thousand in 1860-4. to 25·5 per thousand<sup>1</sup> in 1903. To Australia, in the second half of the nineteenth century, war and chronic unemployment were possibilities as remote as they have ever been in human history.

Again, the argument that the decline represents a vote of censure on the capitalist system fails to explain why Sweden, after years of prosperity under Social Democratic government, still has the lowest birth-rate in Europe. Between 1911 and 1933 the population of Sweden rose from 5·5 million to 6·2 million, but the birth-rate fell from 24·1 to 14·1, the net reproduction rate in 1933 being 0·727, which is lower than that of England and Wales.

Similarly, the fact that the rate of reproduction is declining in the United States and the British Dominions weakens the argument that colonial expansion exhausts a people by drawing off its more virile stock. There is little

## THE CAUSES OF THIS DECLINE

emigration from the U.S.A. and no great expenditure of effort on a colonial empire, yet the birth-rate has been halved in the past fifty years, in spite of an increase in the proportion of women of child-bearing age. Again, although the population of the British Dominions is indeed rising, the birth-rate in Canada is falling even more rapidly than in Great Britain; and in New Zealand and Australia the net reproduction rate is already less than 1·00.

A more ambitious explanation of the decline rests on the argument that civilized life involves a loss of animal vitality, that town life is unnatural, and that fecundity (or power of reproduction) diminishes when people find themselves leading a life that is foreign to their deepest wishes. This argument, in its crude form ('wild animals do not breed in captivity'), overlooks the fact that it is fertility (the actual rate of reproduction) that has declined, not fecundity (or power of reproduction). Indeed, the fecundity (or potential fertility) of civilized races is somewhat higher than that of more primitive people. The problem is psychological, not biological; it is a matter of conscious decision, not of any mysterious loss of reproductive power, and there is no evidence that races automatically die out when their traditional way of life is suddenly disturbed. The primitive races that have dwindled or died out were mostly healthy and fairly long-lived before they came in contact with the white man. Their fertility was low, partly as a result of poor diet and partly owing to early intercourse and the traditional period of abstinence after childbirth. Child mortality was high; and the population was restricted still more by infanticide and abortion. When these primitive races came in contact with the white man's diseases, which are products of crowded life, they could not resist them, nor could they change their habits to meet the rising death-rate. A deep

## THE FALLING BIRTH-RATE

sense of hopelessness and inferiority in face of the white man's skill may have lessened their resistance to disease, but they died out not through any conscious or unconscious wish, but because they were too conservative.

The influence of town life on fertility is less clear than is commonly supposed. Some of the lowest birth-rates ever recorded in time of peace have been in densely populated areas : Berlin (1911), 8·8 ; Oslo (1930), 8·0 ; Vienna (1934), 6·0 ; yet it was in the French agricultural departments—Eure, Lot-et-Garonne, Calvados, Gers—that the decline began in the years between 1830 and 1850. It may well be true that civilized man is not altogether happy in his urban and industrial life, but it is not possible to find any simple relation between the birth-rate and the density of population. Religion, local prejudice, the extent of female employment, and the general level of prosperity and education, are all relevant factors, and their action is complex. Thus, although the birth-rate is usually low in crowded cities, it is often highest in the poorest and most crowded quarters. Indeed, over large urban areas it is often possible to say that the birth-rate is proportional to the number of pawn-brokers per square mile.

### *Relation between Population and Real Income*

If we are to find a factor that strongly influences the birth-rate, it is important to find something that has dominated the outlook during the period. 'The prospect of getting on' seems to be such a factor ; and in an age which expects an ever higher standard of living, we might expect the birth-rate to be connected not with the general level of living, but with the rate of improvement. More precisely, the rate of increase of population might be expected to depend on the rate of increase of real wages.

## POPULATION AND REAL INCOME

It is not easy to work out the average income per person at any time; and still less easy to compare their buying power at different periods. The accepted estimate for England is Bowley's, and working from his figures (supplemented by Colin Clark's more recent data) it is instructive to compare the population of Great Britain at various times with the average value of real income in the preceding twenty years.

GREAT BRITAIN, 1860-1930

*1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930*

Population in millions	23.6	26.0	29.7	33.0	37.0	40.8	42.8	44.8
Real Income (20 yrs' aver.)	100	110	126	142	159	175	184	192
Ratio	.236	.236	.236	.232	.233	.233	.233	.233

The ratio has thus been remarkably constant for nearly a century. In that period, the population of Great Britain has always been directly proportional to the average value of real income per person in the previous twenty years. The same fact might be expressed by saying that the population has been proportional to the square root of the real national income, or by saying that the total increment in the national income has been evenly divided between a rise in the standard of living and an increase in population.

GREAT BRITAIN, 1860-1930

*1860-70 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920-30*

Rise in real income (%)	10.0	14.5	12.7	11.9	10.1	5.1	4.3
Incr. in population (%)	10.2	14.2	11.1	12.1	10.3	4.9	4.6

That there should be a relation between population and the standard of living is not surprising; but it is remarkable

## THE FALLING BIRTH-RATE

that the relation should be so simple, and that the population should adapt itself so quickly. The relatively slow rise in real income in the years between 1900 and 1914, the small setback during the war of 1914–1918, the subsequent recovery, and the sharp fall in 1931 have all been reflected in the subsequent changes of population; and in a general way, the same kind of relation seems to apply to France and Germany as to Great Britain. As the resources of the United States become more fully developed (in the sense in which Britain, France and Germany have long been ‘fully developed’ countries) the United States ratio also tends to become stabilized.

It would, however, be more than rash to regard this correlation as a ‘law of population’; and if we were to examine the problem in detail we would probably discover that it was influenced by many other factors, including the natural human tendency to make an adjustment not through a steady movement, but through a series of diminishing actions and reactions, like a spiral spring adjusting itself to a new load.<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps best described as an unconscious British habit, and we must not assume that the habits of other nations (for example, Sweden) are exactly similar, or that the habit will persist indefinitely. In these matters no ‘law’ is stronger than the will of the people concerned, and a change in national outlook might give a new weight to factors that are at present negligible. But a national outlook seldom changes very quickly; and a habit that has persisted for seventy years is not likely to be abandoned overnight.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics of national income and real wages are, at best, approximate and controversial; and in making any comparison of this kind it would be very easy to choose data that would support a preconceived notion. It is therefore important to say that statistics given in the works of A. L. Bowley and Colin Clark were chosen for analysis before the writer had any idea that a simple relation might be revealed.

## SIGNS OF RECOVERY

Viewed in this light, the birth-rate statistics are less startling than they at first seem. On the whole, the rise in population in the nineteenth century was due to the fact that the death-rate fell much faster than the birth-rate. As industrial and colonial expansion have slowed down, the two have become more nearly equal. (The countries which still have a very high net reproduction rate are those that are industrially backward, and also have appalling death-rates.) Up to the present, the fall in the net reproduction rate in Great Britain has been no more than was needed to maintain the relation between population and real income; and it seems likely that if the average level of real income can be raised still higher the net reproduction rate will again rise. The existence of cheap and effective methods of birth-control that call for no great self-restraint means that the size of the population adapts itself very quickly indeed to any forces that may hinder expansion, so that a halt becomes exceedingly abrupt and gives an impression that population is about to decline. The net reproduction rate is an index extremely sensitive to these changes: it is something like a second differential coefficient in mathematics, and to extend its present movement into the future, without considering the influence of any other factor, may be very misleading. It may well be that the demographers who calculate that if present trends continue the population of Western Europe and the U.S.A. will dwindle to a few millions within a century, are on no surer ground than their predecessors who pointed with horror to the prospect of a Europe with standing room only.

### *Signs of Recovery*

Between the depression of 1931 and the war of 1939, there were already signs that the birth-rate and the net

## THE FALLING BIRTH-RATE

reproduction rate had reached a turning-point in all the leading industrial countries except France:

BIRTH-RATES, 1930-1938

	1930	1932	1934	1936	1938
U.S.A.	18.9	17.4	17.1	16.6	17.6
Gt. Britain & N. Ireland	16.8	15.8	15.2	15.2	15.5
France	18.0	17.2	16.1	15.0	14.6
Germany	17.5	15.1	18.0	19.0	19.7
Italy	26.7	23.5	23.4	22.4	23.6

In some measure this incipient recovery may have been the result of family allowances and other schemes to encourage parenthood, and among the personal motives there may have been (particularly in Germany) an increase in hope and confidence in the future. But behind these personal factors there was the general fact of industrial revival, and it is interesting to note the very limited influence exerted in France, Italy and Germany by measures designed to arrest the downward movement of the birth-rate: where those measures coincided with an accentuated rise in the level of real incomes they have been successful; where they did not, they have failed.<sup>1</sup> The war of 1939 and its subsequent economic disturbances must inevitably produce a new set-back; but there is no reason why such a set-back should be permanent, and some of the factors that have helped to produce the recent recovery may not be influenced by the war and its consequences.

In every country, some groups, divided off by religion or temperament, have a net reproduction rate well above the average, and if the members of these fertile groups do not

<sup>1</sup> The average real income per head in France reached a maximum quite early in the present century (Colin Clark: *The Conditions of Economic Progress*, p. 99). Between 1909 and 1928 it remained practically stationary, and since 1928 it has declined, at first slowly and then (1936-7) more rapidly. There were, however, signs of recovery in 1938, and in 1939 the French birth-rate rose to 14.9.

## INTELLIGENCE AND THE BIRTH-RATE

change their outlook or intermarry with members of other groups, they will gradually come to form a larger and larger section of the whole population. If 5 per cent of a population belonged to a stock that increased by 2 per cent each year, whereas the remaining 95 per cent decreased by 2 per cent, the population would be halved in fifty years, but in less than another century the population would regain its original numbers, this time with 95 per cent of the more fertile groups, and with a net annual increment of 1·8 per cent. At present, the Dutch in South Africa, the French-speaking Catholics of Canada, and the Maoris of New Zealand, are increasing in this way, and there may be similar groups in England, France, and the U.S.A. A change of this kind can be very rapid, and the birth-rate in Scotland is notably higher than in England (and higher among the immigrant Irish than among the native Scottish). We need not assume that these are the groups that will ultimately prove to be the more fertile: they may well be backward groups who have been slow to restrict their fertility; but the possible existence of stocks that are not backward but nevertheless have a high birth-rate must be remembered.

### *Intelligence and the Differential Birth-rate*

Any sign of recovery, however, arouses new fears. The fall in the birth-rate began in the more 'advanced' countries; it rapidly became most marked among the wealthier and more highly educated classes, and then spread to the skilled trades, especially those in which there was remunerative employment for women. Between 1850 and 1900 the fertility of marriages among the upper and middle classes, and among the higher grades of the skilled workers, rapidly decreased, whereas the fertility of farm-labourers, unskilled workers, and miners scarcely altered. If this differential

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birth-rate were to continue, and the most able stocks were to prevent their own survival, the general level of intelligence would decrease.

When psychologists say that this is already happening, their evidence is necessarily indirect, for we have no means of making a direct comparison between the present and, say, a period of forty or sixty years ago. The use of 'intelligence tests' in these matters is not wholly satisfactory, for although the Intelligence Quotient (or the factor G) may be inherent and objective, the quality that is meant by 'intelligence' in ordinary life depends on circumstances. 'Intelligence' among a nation of farmers is not quite the same as intelligence among a nation of mechanics, and the tests in vogue in our own time are likely to be biased in favour of the mechanics. If, however, we accept the I.Q. as a real measure of intelligence we can find one striking piece of evidence. The brighter children in school generally come from smaller families than the backward children; the families to which subnormal children belong are nearly twice as large as those of unusually clever children. If intelligence is inherited, as it appears to be, the average level of intelligence must be declining rapidly as a result of this differential birth-rate. Already, in a period of twenty years, the percentage of mental defectives in Great Britain has doubled, and R. B. Cattell<sup>1</sup> calculates that if present trends continue the average intelligence of the British population will fall by 3 per cent in every thirty years.

This trend is, however, unlikely to continue. A significant feature of the recent tendency of the birth-rate to rise, or at

<sup>1</sup> *The Fight for our National Intelligence*. In the same work, the author records some important observations on the effect of environment. When the children of backward or mentally deficient parents are taken from very poor homes and brought up in a residential school with conditions as near perfect as possible, they improve in every possible way except in I.Q.

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any rate to decline more slowly, is the marked recovery among the upper and middle classes. These sections of the population which were the first to restrict their fertility have been the first to correct their excessive restriction. Meanwhile the knowledge and the mental outlook that caused their restriction is filtering down to the less educated and the less intelligent, and if this movement continues the present differential birth-rate will be reversed. In particular, it seems unlikely that the subnormal will ever increase enough to become a serious burden. They are usually poor citizens, with little sense of social or family responsibility, and they will not willingly have large families if they can easily avoid it.<sup>1</sup> Unless the upper and middle classes and the class of skilled workmen decide to restrict their families still more, the widest possible diffusion of the means to family limitation will end by raising rather than lowering the general level of intelligence.

Apart altogether from this reversal of the differential birth-rate, it is doubtful whether the average intelligence could continue to decline as quickly as the statistics suggest. Although it seems to be true that the children of exceptionally intelligent people are themselves of somewhat more than the average intelligence, yet the 'spread' of intelligence is so great that the action of selective breeding is very slow. Family limitation among the well-to-do, and the restriction of marriage among the higher ranks of employed women, must tend to lower the mental level. But it is no easier to breed out intelligence than to breed out mental deficiency: discrimination against the most able

<sup>1</sup> 'Their intellectual limitations, while in some cases enabling them to realize their *rights*, seldom enable them to realize their *duties*. Rights are often visual and concrete in the way of benefits that can be seen and experienced. Duties are often more abstract, and so beyond the comprehension of dull intellects.' J. Duncan, *Mental Deficiency*, p. 136.

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strains is not new, and in some countries it has long been customary for many of the most able males to take up the celibate life of monks. If selective breeding has not appreciably lowered the average level in these countries (and there is no evidence that it has) it is scarcely likely to have that effect among ourselves.

It seems, therefore, that neither the trend of the birth-rate itself, nor the present difference between the fertility of different classes, is likely to produce any very alarming results. If the material standard of living can be raised, population will increase; if it tends to become stabilized at a new level, population will do the same. The great expansion of population in the nineteenth century was the counterpart of the increase in production; the countries that took the lead in modern industry were also the leaders in the expansion of population, and other countries still have a good deal of leeway to make up both in population and in production. The declining birth-rate of the more advanced countries is not a sign of their senility, but merely the result of a slackening in the rate of industrial development, and in time it will affect the more backward countries in the same way. If the more advanced countries wish to retain their lead in population, their first effort must be to increase the efficiency of their economic and industrial system.

### *The Motives of the Individual*

Given the existing aims and ideals of our society, the growth of population is likely to depend mainly on industrial expansion; but it still remains to examine the conscious motives that influence the individual. If our interpretation is right, then the motives that have led people to restrict their families are slowly losing their force, and those that encourage somewhat bigger families, or oppose any further

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reductions are gaining ground. But this will not happen automatically. However much the conscious motives of the individual may depend on economic or biological forces, they have their own laws of development and change, and they can be changed only through argument and discussion on their own ground.

The first serious inquiry into the conscious motives that lead people to limit their families was undertaken in Australia, where the birth-rate had fallen steadily and continuously ever since 1889. A Royal Commission appointed in 1903 by the Government of New South Wales reported that the reasons for deliberate birth-control most commonly given by witnesses were :

- (1) An unwillingness to submit to the strain and worry of children,
- (2) A dislike of the interference with pleasure and comfort involved in child-bearing and child-rearing,
- (3) A desire to avoid the actual physical discomfort of gestation, parturition, and lactation,
- (4) An increasing love of luxury and social pleasures.

These motives certainly sound more convincing than others that have been given in our own time ; they cover a wider range of cases, and they are in accordance with other obvious factors, such as the effect of commercial advertisement in turning peoples' ambitions away from the desire to have a family towards forms of amusement and indulgence of more obvious and immediate benefit to industry.

But the answers of the Australians leave us asking why there has been 'an increasing love of luxury and social pleasures', and why men and women have partly lost the natural passion to see their own children around them and to see them succeeding where they themselves have failed.

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No doubt there is a price to pay for parenthood, but why have the people of our time become reluctant to pay it? We can find partial answers in the demand for women in industry, and in the consequent decline of the doctrine that 'a woman's place is the home'. To some extent the general change may be due to the example of the upper class, which has economized in children in order to preserve its standard of living, and in so doing has given social sanction to the idea that large families are vulgar. But we must also take into account the growth of systems of insurance which, by relieving grown-up sons and daughters of the duty of supporting their parents, make children a liability and not an asset. We must remember, too, that modern industry has made society more fluid: people seldom live in one place for more than a generation, and the old settled habit by which farms and industries were handed on from father to son has therefore decayed. Again, the whole tempo of life has quickened: the middle class no longer thinks in terms of generations, but in terms of the number of years they must wait before they can get out of the city to the suburbs. Among the artisan class, too, there is a demand for a higher standard of living, even at the cost of a smaller family, which is not purely a matter of selfishness. The standard of education, acumen and responsibility required from this class has risen considerably; complex and delicate tasks, calling for prolonged concentration and alertness, cannot be carried out unless the worker is well-fed, well-clothed, and free from worry about the welfare of his family and friends; and the 'level of subsistence' depends on the work to be done.

None of these considerations, nor all of them taken together, wholly explain why 'the love of pleasure' has taken a form that has made men and women forget that parent-

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hood is a normal and necessary part of their development and has made them look for satisfaction to material possessions, trivial amusements, and pleasures that demand neither preliminary effort nor endurance. The advertiser, with his cultivation of snobbery and social rivalry, has something to do with it; but the advertiser can only enlarge and cultivate a feeling that already exists: he is the channel through which the disease acts, not the disease itself. It is plain that there has been an alteration in moral outlook, and that any reversal of the present trend must depend on yet another change of outlook. Before we can be sure that a turning-point has been reached we must understand the origins of that sense of failure and frustration which is so often given as a reason for family limitation, and to do this we must examine the other symptoms of material decline.

We can say at once that there are two distinct parts to the problem. On the one hand there is the decline of religion; on the other there is the loss of confidence in the nineteenth-century conception of progress. As the rapid development of industry in the nineteenth century encouraged ideals of individual money-making and material satisfaction (and thereby undermined the ideals of religion), so the slowing down of industrial progress in more recent times, together with our failure to solve the problems of international rivalry, has disappointed hopes based on the conception of rapid, unlimited and automatic material progress. Whilst many people are still at the stage of abandoning their traditional religion for the modern faith in science, politics, and the right of the individual to do whatever brings him the quickest satisfaction, others have already found the new faith unsatisfactory.

In the period of confusion and disappointment that will follow the present war, the sense of frustration or of aim-

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lessness that has weighed upon a few people in the past twenty years is likely to become far more widely diffused than it is at present. The very possibility of such widespread pessimism points to a deeply-rooted social malady; but it is important to remember that among the people with whom it originated, the outlook that helped to produce the decline is already on the wane, and that so far as Britain is concerned, the period in which the birth-rate seemed likely to fall indefinitely is already past.

## *Chapter 2*

### OTHER SYMPTOMS OF DECAY

#### *Material Symptoms of Decline*

No-one who considers for a moment the conditions of life in the early part of the nineteenth century can doubt the reality and value of our material progress. The evidence given before the Factory Commissioners in 1833 speaks more eloquently than any table of statistics. Men, women, and children, worked fourteen, fifteen or sixteen hours a day, for miserably small wages, without holidays, without recreation, under conditions that were almost unspeakable. ‘My two sons (one ten, the other thirteen) work at the Milnes’s factory at Lenton. They go at half-past five in the morning; don’t stop at breakfast or tea-time. They stop at dinner half an hour. Come home at a quarter before ten. . . . I have been obliged to beat ’em with a strap in their shirts, to pinch ’em in order to get them well awake. It made me cry to be obliged to do it.’

The very intensity and brutality of effort, and the meagreness of the immediate reward for the great mass of the population, made possible a rapid accumulation of material wealth that led to a higher standard of living for all. By the end of the nineteenth century, real wages had been more

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than doubled, hours of work had been reduced by one-third, and the care of the aged, the infirm and the unemployed had become a matter of public concern. Infant mortality, which had been over 40 per cent at the beginning of the century, was reduced to less than 10 per cent, and the expectation of life was nearly doubled. At the same time illiteracy was abolished, and the results of compulsory education made possible the experiment of universal adult suffrage. Crimes of violence diminished, and even in the most backward cities of the United States, which had to cope with an unassimilated immigrant population, life for the great majority of the people was immeasurably more comfortable and more secure than it had been a century before.

And yet, in the years before 1914, there was already a doubt. Democracy had its dangers, and the rate of material progress was decreasing. Between 1896 and 1913 real wages in England scarcely increased, and even before 1900 British industry had ceased to keep pace with that of other countries :

### INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

#### *Coal (in millions of tons)*

	<i>1890</i>	<i>1900</i>	<i>1913</i>	<i>1927</i>	<i>1937</i>
United Kingdom	182	225	287	255	244
Germany	70	109	190	154	184
France	26	33	40	52	44
U.S.A.	99	212	478	518	448

#### *Steel (in millions of tons)*

	<i>1890</i>	<i>1900</i>	<i>1913</i>	<i>1927</i>	<i>1937</i>
United Kingdom	3.6	4.9	9.0	9.6	13.2
Germany	2.2	6.3	18.6	16.2	19.4
France	0.7	1.5	5.0	8.4	7.9
U.S.A.	4.3	10.2	31.3	44.5	51.4

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British shipping lost its absolute preponderance, and cotton ceased to be a British monopoly. The German steel output passed the British in 1896; and meanwhile British agriculture was neglected, the yield per acre decreased, and steadily and persistently farm-land went out of cultivation.

Up to 1913, it might seem that the decline was purely relative and limited to Great Britain, and it was in this sense that the figures were at first interpreted. In 1901, the Prince of Wales reported a widespread feeling in the Dominions that England must 'wake up' commercially. In 1903, Alfred Marshall drew up a memorandum (published five years later) in which he pointed out that the prosperity of the nineteenth century had bred among manufacturers a lethargy and self-complacency. 'They worked shorter hours, and they exerted themselves less to obtain new practical ideas than their fathers had done, and thus a part of England's leadership was destroyed rapidly. In the nineties it became clear that in the future Englishmen must take their business as seriously as their grandfathers had done, and as their American and German rivals were doing: that their training for business must be methodical, like that of their new rivals, and not merely practical, on lines that had sufficed for the simpler world of two generations ago; and lastly that the time had passed at which they could afford merely to teach foreigners and not learn from them in return.'<sup>1</sup>

Marshall's memorandum and other similar diagnoses produced some effect: technical education was improved to keep pace with that of Germany, and attempts were made to revive in British manufacturers the spirit of enterprise that had actuated their fathers. But there was no general improvement. The attitude of the trade unions,

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of 1903 (White Paper No 321 of 1908)

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which was directed towards increasing wages and shortening the hours of work, remained unaltered. Efforts to increase the output per worker were neglected, or even opposed. The national income scarcely expanded, and much of the energy and forethought that had formerly gone into useful work went into strikes and industrial disputes.

Between 1870 and 1890 the material standard of living had risen by 30 per cent; between 1900 and 1920 the increase was only 15 per cent, and although new products and new forms of entertainment appeared, they were mostly bought at the expense of other goods and pastimes. Education still advanced, but it disappointed the hopes that were built on it. The circulation of newspapers increased, but their intellectual level did not improve, and the more serious and competent periodicals lost their public. The franchise was extended, but the level of political debate was lowered. In the years that followed the war of 1914, the standard of living resumed its upward movement, but unemployment among British workers, which had averaged 5 per cent between 1890 and 1913, was doubled. Between 1925 and 1938 the figure fluctuated, but the average remained over 11 per cent, and this failure to provide profitable work for all overshadowed the real advance in wages, in housing and in public services.

### *Social Symptoms*

The symptoms of decay were not solely economic, and they became more intensified in the years that followed 1918. As the expansion of the national income slowed down, so the struggle between different sections of society to secure a greater share of it was intensified. The sense of national unity, the belief that history, in spite of occasional reverses, was a directed movement pointing to a Utopian future, the

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conviction that 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' was an aim that could give direction and value to the life of the believer himself, all these decayed. The belief that endurance, diligence, honesty and unselfishness were virtues independent of their consequences had weakened as religious faith decayed; and the growing sense of insecurity that came from the fear of war and unemployment combined with the prevailing philosophies of the age to give many people a profound feeling that life had no value or significance at all.

To this confusion, the churches could make no effective answer. They had not merely lost their influence; they seemed to be incapable of understanding the reason or the nature of the change. There were pathetic 'recalls' to religion, but there was no visible attempt to state the Christian doctrines in all their starkness and rigour, or to face the real problems of a minority church embedded in a secular and commercial civilization; and there was no effective effort to liberate the churches themselves from the mixed infection of social snobbery and easy-going liberal optimism. The apparent absence of any clear-cut religious belief, and the increasing toleration of every attitude, however silly, that called itself a faith, did not prevent churchmen from playing an active and important part in humanitarian work; but it deprived religion of all intellectual authority. It confirmed the young in their impression that the day of religious faith was over, and in so doing it lowered the quality of candidates for ordination. To those who still held with vigour and intellectual clarity an orthodox religious faith, the internal decline of the established Church was no less disquieting than its loss of external influence; to those, far greater in number, who regarded religion with indifference or contempt, the fact that the façade

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remained, and that the Anglican bishops retained their seats in the House of Lords, was itself a proof of British decadence.

In public life, no less than in matters of religion and of industry, the signs were ominous. Among those who passed through the universities between 1918 and 1939, respect for established institutions was regarded as a mark of mental inferiority. It was pointed out that the average age of dignitaries of Church and State, and of the higher civil servants, and naval and military commanders, was twenty years greater than that of their predecessors a century ago; and it was urged that their outlook was not actively conservative, but merely senile, and that it was typical of the whole governing class.

This impression was confirmed by the necrophilic flavour of the upper-class newspapers, which seemed to be more interested in the past than in the present, and interested not in the real historical movements of the past but in trivial personal anecdotes. These newspapers and their readers showed a passion for 'precedent', not for the sake of any useful lesson that could be drawn from it, but as if the mere existence of a formal precedent were a source of comfort and reassurance. They seemed to cater for readers who preferred ignorance and complacency to any knowledge that might call for thought and action. During the years leading up to 1939, the danger of war was persistently underrated: the policy of presenting news in a cautious, unsensational manner was stretched to include the writing of reassuring leaders, wholly unwarranted by the facts; and in the spring of 1939 the correspondence columns of a great newspaper were filled with letters attacking (under the title 'jitter-bugs') the sober and responsible news service of the B.B.C.

There is a strong case to be made out for deliberate

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understatement: the work of a nation must continue, and in times of danger it is not strictly necessary that the whole nation should be alarmed, but only that the government should be forewarned; at all times it is impolitic to express doubt about the reliability of a foreign statesman's word; it is at least tactless to ascribe any but honest and decent intentions to a nation with which you might wish to remain at peace; it is downright foolish to announce the inevitability of war at a time when you are wholly unprepared to fight. But after making all allowances, and remembering all the reasons against saying in public print all that one says in committee or in private, it remains true that over a long period of years a most influential section of the British Press steadily gave an unduly optimistic picture of political and industrial affairs; and it is not surprising that, on this score alone, outsiders concluded that the English governing class was not merely sluggish, but also moribund.

In politics, the period between the two wars was one of bitter disappointment. The League of Nations, which had never aroused more than a lukewarm enthusiasm in the older conservative statesmen, failed in its major problems. The same statesmen, though little by little they extended the domain of state control, achieved no spectacular success in their efforts to find work for all. And yet the socialists in England and France were no more successful in their attempts to make a drastic and dramatic change from private enterprise to socialized monopoly, and to change the main incentive of industrial activity from private gain to public service. Politics had failed, and democracy appeared to be a sham: electors were, in the main, controlled by the rich and by the old governing classes, and where the masses did gain real democratic power they failed to bring order

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into confusion. To many people, it seemed that Italy, Germany, and Russia, by their sacrifice of personal liberty and freedom of thought, had succeeded where the democracies had failed. They had established order in place of confusion, confidence in place of doubt, compulsory work in place of compulsory idleness.

### *The Decline of Culture*

By the nineteen-thirties, it was plain that the prosperity of the nineteenth century, in spite of the great advance in housing, social services, and public health, had not been followed by that all-round improvement in knowledge, taste, intelligence, and conduct for which liberal reformers had hoped. Compulsory education, which was little more than training for profitable employment, had produced a meagre literacy, a deep distrust of everything that was 'highbrow' or difficult, an equally profound conviction that religion and tradition were 'out-of-date', and a credulous and receptive attitude of mind that welcomed passive amusement, soft thinking, commercial gambling and fortune-telling, and the vicarious excitement of gruesome or obscene newspapers. In the autumn of 1939, the most widely-read book in England was an astrological work called *Hitler's Last Year of Power*.

Nor was this delinquescence limited to a single class. In preferring sentimentality, self-deception and superstition to sober judgement the masses were merely following an example that had been set for them by their social betters and by their government. Philosophy and the arts were no longer 'the proper study of a gentleman'; and since education meant training for profitable work, 'culture' was a superfluity, a mere drawing-room accomplishment which could be well spared. The fact that this luxury might in the

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long run be a necessity was ignored; the English, as one writer said, blundered unconsciously over the line dividing necessity from superfluity.

This blunder, this failure to see that religion and the arts might not be mere frivolous amusements but a necessary conservation of vitality and mental health, arose partly through an all-pervading commercialism and partly through a misunderstanding of the democratic principle. The dogma that 'what the people want is right' was not clearly distinguished from the optimistic doctrine that 'the people want what is right', and in the field of literature a well-known reviewer could seriously maintain that the 'aim of the author is to write best-sellers'. Literary periodicals with a high standard of criticism disappeared as the publishers transferred their advertisements to Sunday newspapers and supplements like the *Herald Tribune Books* that were aimed at a larger public than a strictly critical journal could ever hope to attract. By the summer of 1939 there were only two serious literary papers in England: an admirable quarterly called *Scrutiny*, with a small circulation, and *The Times Literary Supplement*, which, like the more serious libraries, had fewer readers in 1938 than in 1922. The notion of quality became submerged in the idea that 'it's all a matter of taste', and the untutored taste of the individual was tempered only by the fear of being excessively eccentric or excessively conventional. One ingenious publisher succeeded in making the best of both worlds, by advertising '*A Novel for a Few People*. 20th Thousand'.

Poetry, and any work of imaginative insight, found a decreasing number of readers, but people were always willing to preserve a famous poet's birthplace, or to read the lives of his mistresses, or to praise the prodigious scholarship of his editors. It was not that readers failed to distin-

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guish between the husk and the kernel: it was a matter of actively preferring the husks. The critics who most closely represented the taste of the upper class showed an uncanny knack of detecting any work of merit, and disliking it intensely. In place of any real respect for imaginative insight, reliable history and serious philosophical thought, there was a curious body of knowledge, often inaccurate and always trivial, which was handed on, frequently through the correspondence columns of various weekly English and American papers. It was a kind of folk-lore, consisting of scraps of isolated knowledge without co-ordination or purpose, and the writers seemed to be quite unaware that there were authorities in the matters they were discussing: encyclopaedias, public libraries, reference catalogues, meant nothing to them. It was plain that they had learnt something at school, whether they had been educated at Eton or at Hackney Downs, but it was also plain that no-one had ever taught them to pursue a study beyond the point at which their formal education ended. This pseudo-literary babble, which at its worst preferred Disraeli's *Curiosities of Literature* to Shakespeare, and at its best preferred Lamb's essays to Arnold's solid argument, and Boswell's amiable chatter to Johnson's hard-bitten realism, was nothing more than gossip, and as gossip it was harmless. But it was sometimes mistaken for serious learning, and this confusion helped to confirm the young in their opinion that science was knowledge and that literature was amusing (or boring) twaddle.

At the same time, neglect of the disinterested element in the arts weakened the understanding of *all* disinterested values. The Victorian ideal of self-improvement may have been a temptation to hypocrisy and self-deception, but it also involved discipline and abnegation; it implied a recog-

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nition of moral, intellectual and aesthetic authority, and it made effort itself a virtue, so that even in failure there was some reward. When self-improvement degenerated into self-expression this sense of achievement and of value was lost. The pursuit of pleasure or amusement, or the indulgence of a taste that is frankly regarded as personal, offers no consolation at all when it fails to attain its end.

In England there were institutions that might have been expected to cope with such a situation, but neither in art nor literature did the official academies succeed in maintaining their own authority. Writers and artists of merit were imbued with the idea that whatever was official was bad; they refused to join the official bodies or resigned in a fit of petulance, so that each academy tended to become what the rebellious artists had supposed it to be, a collection of innate conservatives and second-rate artists devoid of imagination and insight, who commended only those works that successfully imitated the technical accomplishments of the past. 'Official' authority was discredited among the artists, and among the general public all authority whatever.

The same contempt for authority was found in almost every field save that of science. The upper classes were taught a loyalty that was directed not towards imagination, truth, and justice, but towards all established institutions; and the teaching itself provoked a current of rebellion. It was easy, in an age of science, to ridicule a code of honour that placed a low value on intelligence and took its metaphors from cricket and football. Instead of trying to broaden and purify the code, novelists, humorists and low comedians helped to bring it into contempt. Because some old loyalties were false, the idea of loyalty itself was discredited; and attacks on the British Empire which began as generous

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movements on behalf of subject peoples merged in a general subversiveness that included everything from the English Public Schools to marriage, parenthood, and family life.

### *'The Disillusion of the Post-War Years'*

These disruptions of tradition did not go very deep, but in England they strongly influenced the class that might have been expected to provide the intellectual leadership of the country. To those who looked for it, they gave a kind of sanction to casualness and irresponsibility; and they became an inherent part of a 'progressive' outlook. And yet this progressive outlook itself was not wholly satisfactory. Progressive morals, based on the right of the individual to self-fulfilment, resulted in unhappy marriages and discontented children. People who set out to defy traditional dogma enjoyed a conviction of their own intellectual and moral superiority, but their missionary zeal for the perfection of mankind, cut off from its religious roots and faced with the practical difficulties of reform, often dried up into a cynical materialism ending in bitterness and self-pity.

The sense of failure and futility was personal as well as public, private as well as political, and it was deepened by the growing conviction that the sciences were not, after all, able to answer the perennial problems of philosophy. The popular effect of relativity theory was to reinforce the belief that no judgements were absolutely valid; the effect of psychological theory was to instil a deep suspicion of all motives that seemed to be generous and altruistic. The study of anthropology and comparative religion deepened still further the distrust of traditional doctrines of morality and religion. The comforting certainties of the nineteenth century had vanished: the neat deterministic world of 'classical' physics was replaced by a world that could no longer

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be pictured either as waves or particles, a world in which mathematical certainty and precise observation were both radically impossible. And in spite of all attempts to produce a unified theory of the physical world, the working hypotheses of macroscopic and microscopic physics became increasingly divergent. In biology, although one 'vitalistic' phenomenon after another was explained in mechanistic terms, the general explanation of organic life in inorganic terms came no nearer. Similarly, the gaps between psychology and physiology remained unbridged, and the problem of relating material science to moral, aesthetic and religious truth was drastically solved by one school of philosophers who asserted that all definite statements in metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, and theology, were either meaningless, or tautological, or mere expressions of personal sentiment.

Nor were the scientists themselves quite happy in their work. They were no longer sure that their researches would reveal the ultimate structure of the world, nor were they convinced that their discoveries would benefit humanity. On the one hand, there was a growing conviction that the complexities of nature were endless in their variety, and that although human ingenuity could always impose some sort of order on the observations made possible by every new instrument, there was no prospect of reaching finality in any direction. On the other hand, the humanitarian claims for science, which had been so strong in the era of industrial development, weakened as the scientists saw their humanitarian efforts wasted or turned to evil. The immense momentum of the nineteenth-century passion for the sciences continued; laboratories and professorships were still endowed, and the professors felt that they must do something to justify their endowments; but more and more, like the poets and philosophers, they turned aside

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from their proper work to write on social and political topics.

Out of this welter of confusion and frustration there emerged few positive ideas that commanded general assent: the nearest approach was pacifism. And often this pacifism was founded, not on the doctrine that other people's lives were sacred, but on the belief that nothing was worth fighting for. It was a doctrine that seldom penetrated below the surface level of opinion; but it was widely held, and influenced all classes of society. Unsure of their position, uncertain of the temper of the people, the governing class lacked that confidence, that belief in something greater than the individual, which is the foundation both of heroism and of the cultivation of the civilized arts; the intellectual class was in permanent and ineffectual opposition to all familiar loyalties; the ordinary citizen, taught to ask for rights but not to accept responsibilities, no longer looked upon the interests of his country as the collective interests of himself and his fellow-citizens. None of the three had any sense of mission, any conviction of the values of life; and the general sense of failure was sometimes described as 'the disillusion of the post-war years'.

The description was inadequate; the war of 1914 was not the sole cause of this disillusion; the deterioration of the upper class could not reasonably be bracketed with the shortcomings of democracy; the disappointment of those who expected the war of 1914-1918 to end in some great good could not be identified with the outlook of those intellectual young members of the upper classes who turned communist in 1931; the decline in public religion could not profitably be equated to the failure of non-religious philosophies. Yet the phrase 'the disillusion of the post-war years' was meant to cover all these. It was applied to the

'THE DISILLUSION OF THE POST-WAR YEARS' theory of relativity, to the failure of plans for world revolution, to T. S. Eliot's poetry, to the misfortunes of the League of Nations, to Freud's psychology and Epstein's sculpture, to every activity and field of knowledge, to attitudes that were plainly conflicting, and to policies diametrically opposed to each other.

And yet, in spite of this confusion, the phrase was apt; 'disillusion' did describe the temper of the age. The simple-minded Christian who abandoned his traditional belief for the larger promises of liberal atheism had something in common with the Wellsian who despaired of all plans for the rational improvement of mankind and determined to concentrate on setting his own house in order. Both were more conscious of the loss of old certainties than of the gain of new convictions. So, too, those who abandoned traditional morality as worn-out convention had something in common with their more sophisticated contemporaries who found that the direct pursuit of self-expression, individual liberty, and the harmonious development of man, led only to intellectual confusion, moral weariness<sup>8</sup> and the petrifaction of feeling.

In semi-intellectual circles the temper was one of rebellion merging into cynical indifference. It was the fashion not to construct but to demolish; the popular activity was debunking, the favourite epithet was 'bogus'. And behind all this demolition there was no constructive purpose, for every constructive purpose could be shown to be 'bogus' from some other point of view. Sometimes the attack on established order rested on judgements that derived their strength from Christianity; at other times it was based on the conviction that whatever was new must be good and whatever was old must be bad; and often it was reinforced by the extension of ideas of individual liberty from the do-

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main of politics and business to that of morality and private conduct. Divided allegiance to the morality of money, power and self-fulfilment on the one hand, and to that of Christianity on the other, made it easy to discredit both. Each outlook was attacked on its lowest level, and the resulting obliteration of authorities enabled the ordinary man to turn away from philosophies that were 'bogus' to others that were beneath contempt.

### *Manifestation in the Arts*

Whether consciously and explicitly, or indirectly and obscurely, the arts reflected the uncertainty and confusion of the time. Musicians and painters, as well as novelists and poets, found themselves obsessed with the problems of the machine age, the decay of culture, the confusion of moralities, and the loss of confidence in human nature and in progress. There were the novels of Aldous Huxley, deepening from light-hearted scepticism to anxious scrutiny, and those of D. H. Lawrence, trying to find a new religion to restore the age. Musicians and painters tried to find new inspiration in the precision and clangour of machines. Sculptors turned in despair from familiar beauty to a new harshness and deliberate brutality; it was claimed that they were trying to express a sterner and less flattering view of life; other critics could see in their work nothing but ugliness and disorder.

All this was not wholly new; from the political optimism of Shelley, through the scepticism of Clough and the quietude of Tennyson, down to the stoic pessimism of Hardy and Housman, the poets and critics of the nineteenth century had been concerned with matters of politics, religion and morality. The doctrine of Art for Art's sake, from the Parnassians down to the formalism of Clive Bell and

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Roger Fry, had been no more than a desperate attempt to avoid the artist's burden and preserve some sort of art, however trivial, in a hostile world; and this attempt to preserve form at the expense of substance not only widened the gap between 'popular' and 'highbrow' art but also provoked as a reaction the strictly rational and sociological works of Wells and Shaw.

In poetry there was a sharp division between the writers who recognized the moral uncertainty and intellectual confusion of the age, and those who tried to believe that the world was still the world of 1880. It was these latter who were still for a time the more popular, but their popularity could not stand the shock of circumstances, and often it was the 'disillusioned' poets who showed, even when they modified traditional form and method, the greater knowledge and understanding of poetry's traditional purposes. For them the lyric poetry of simple expansive enthusiasm had become impossible; their images were the images of disintegration and disaster, and in their rhythms there was a calculated flatness, a deliberate avoidance of anything that might be taken for grandiloquence or cocksure heartiness. Yeats in *The Second Coming* spoke with a fierce prophetic gloom:

'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.'

This vision of destruction and futility, which reached its culmination in T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, was 'difficult' and 'obscure' to many who wished to understand it, and still

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more difficult to others who did not. The recognition of disintegration and futility was mistaken for the disease itself, and no distinction was drawn between the writers whose prophetic insight sprang from an inner certainty of judgement and those whose work expressed the spirit of the age only through its own inherent confusion. Eliot's poetry, and less certainly that of Yeats, was in the prophetic tradition, the tradition not of Cassandra but of Isaiah and Ezekiel. It was a vision, not an expression, of disintegration, and it was held together by that sense of form and imaginative unity which is the artist's equivalent of confidence. It differed from the poetry of Hardy and Housman in its denunciation of human error, not of the nature of things; and it differed from the poetry of its lesser imitators in that it made no personal appeal for sympathy. Housman and Hardy, in spite of their incessant complaints about the nature of things, had still maintained a stoic dignity. The lesser writers of the nineteen-thirties, with no clear vision of the evil in the world and in themselves, lapsed into incoherence and self-commiseration. The pity that Wilfred Owen had asked on behalf of others, they asked for themselves. In this, and in their abrupt transition from one outlook to another, they accurately reflected an age that was sorry for itself and could not understand its own misfortunes. In abandoning forms and subjects foreign to their feeling, they were painfully and strictly honest, and honesty can at times achieve a 'passionate intensity'. But honesty without a secure basis of judgement is not enough: it cannot even rise to a steady hand in satire.

Lacking any such foundation, and with an audience guided only by a determination not to be deceived, the arts were full of feverish revolt and eccentricities. Post-impressionism, cubism, vorticism, surrealism, abstract art, social

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realism, succeeded each other with increasing rapidity, until only Herbert Read could keep pace with the revolutions. In place of traditional form and subject we were given imitations of African sculpture and engineering diagrams, drawings that resembled the scribbling of children and the mentally diseased, and patterns based on accidental blots and the natural form of curious stones. In all this there was something more than ugliness and incoherence; in the attack on tradition there was a determined attempt to broaden and fructify the tradition itself, and in the disregard of logical coherence and photographic accuracy there was an equally determined attempt to recapture the imaginative element that was in danger of being smothered under a conventional or sentimental realism. The very profusion and diversity of schools might be read as a sign of vitality and energy; but it was equally possible to say that the energy was not the co-ordinated energy of life, but the energy of decomposition and degeneration. The world of imagination and the world of material reality had fallen apart, and the one could no longer be imaged through the other.

### *The Symptoms Are Not confined to Britain*

None of the symptoms were confined to Britain: in some measure the authoritarian revolutions in Italy and Germany were based on recognition of the increasing disorder. However trivial and ephemeral some of the lesser manifestations may have been, however easily they may disappear from sight in the turmoil of war and the acrimony of domestic politics, the malady itself remains. The difficulties are the difficulties of the whole of Western Europe, and in the long run perhaps of other countries too. They certainly take as acute a form in France and in the United States as

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they do in England. The degeneracy of France and the decline of the British Empire were favourite themes for American writers in the years before 1940; yet it is hard to find any symptoms of decline in the older countries that cannot be paralleled in the younger.

The American birth-rate shows the same trend as the British (in New York City it fell from 35·7 per thousand in 1900 to 13·5 in 1939); real wages since 1900 have risen less in the United States than in Great Britain; financial crises are as frequent in America as in Europe, and call for more heroic measures of relief; and by 1939 a bewildering mixture of moral indignation and short-sighted isolationism was as common in America as it had been in Britain up to 1938. The standard of accuracy, intelligence and decency is no higher in American journalism than in British; and although university students in America outnumber those in Britain by ten to one, they are not wholly successful in protecting the ordinary American from clap-trap religion, astrological superstition, bogus science and imbecile politics. The material prosperity of the American middle classes, who take the monthly sales of electric refrigerators as an index of national health, cannot wholly mask the impoverished thought and the vulgarity of aim that are already producing a state of vague and discontented boredom. Literature and the arts fare no better in America than in England; and if a few wealthy Americans still buy pictures and support unprofitable magazines it is merely that they are behind the times in their imitation of the English upper class. Material, intellectual and moral symptoms of decline, and a growing sense of the aimlessness of existence and the worthlessness of publicly proclaimed ideals, are found on both sides of the Atlantic; and they cannot be explained by any theory that applies to one side only.

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America came late into the field of industrial competition, and started with an immense advantage in resources and undeveloped territory; and if the rate of material advance must reach a maximum and then decline, the climax will necessarily come later in America than in countries that are already highly developed and densely populated. In outlook and ideas the United States are subject to the same influences as the 'declining' democracies of Western Europe, and although the width of the Atlantic may sometimes enable the United States to maintain a political and military detachment that is easily mistaken for moral superiority, three thousand miles of water cannot wholly stop the passage either of ideas or of bombing planes.

### *Chapter 3*

## DECLINE OF THE WEST?

*Spengler's Decline of the West*

When, in 1918, Spengler published his *Untergang des Abendlandes*, the symptoms of decline were far less obvious than they are today, but his doctrine—that all Western Europe was in decay—was one that commended itself to a bankrupt and defeated nation. He contended ‘that the 19th and 20th centuries, hitherto looked on as the highest point of an ascending straight line of world-history, are in reality a stage of life which may be observed in every Culture that has ripened to its limit’.<sup>1</sup> Spengler claimed to be the first historian to produce a science of history: he maintained that the parallel between one ‘culture’ and another was so close that he could forecast the future, and he argued that socialism, impressionism, electric railways, torpedoes and differential equations were strictly analogous to opinions and devices that had appeared in other civilizations which had passed their zenith. Western Culture was at the stage reached by Classical Culture in 300 B.C., and it was inevitable that an age of Caesarism (of which Cecil Rhodes was the precursor) should follow.

<sup>1</sup> *The Decline of the West* (trans. C. F. Atkinson), Vol. I, p. 39

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Spengler wrote with a deep contempt for the empirical methods of the scientist;<sup>1</sup> he preferred intuitions to statistics, he read a profound meaning into the predominating colours of different schools of painting, he dismissed inconvenient facts as 'superficial', he talked in terms of nebulous Hegelian abstractions beyond direct observation and control, and on every page he confided momentous platitudes and partial truths with all the hushed solemnity of a charlatan's italics. But although his claims to out-Shakespeare Shakespeare and to reveal a true inwardness invisible to common historians sounded like advertisements for a patent medicine, his observations were often shrewd: 'In place of a type-true people, born of and grown on the soil, there is a new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the countryman and especially that highest form of countryman, the country gentleman.'<sup>2</sup>

In a later book,<sup>3</sup> in which he modified his fatalism and welcomed the Nazi Revolution of 1933, Spengler asserted that 'the nation as society, once an organic web of families, threatens to dissolve from the city outwards, into a sum of private atoms, each intent on extracting from his own and other lives the maximum of amusement'. The woman's emancipation demanded in Ibsen's time had been emancipation, not from the husband, but from the responsibility of parenthood, just as men's emancipation had signified freedom from duties towards family and State. 'The whole Liberal-Socialistic problem literature revolves about this

<sup>1</sup> See *The Decline of the West*, Vol. II, p. 31, where Spengler castigates 'English Science'.

<sup>2</sup> *The Decline of the West*, Vol. I, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *The Hour of Decision*.

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suicide of the white race. It has been the same in all other civilizations.'

To historians and philosophers Spengler's argument was unconvincing; they tabulated many hundreds of errors of fact, and they pointed out that in his immense simplifications he took far too little account of the complexity of history, with its action and reaction of ideas. But today the symptoms to which he pointed can no longer be ignored, and his general argument is one that now occurs to thousands of people who have not read *The Decline of the West* nor even heard of it. Today it is usually not the whole of European culture that is said to be decadent, but the outlook and the political and economic institutions of the democracies. Countries that have undergone anti-democratic revolutions are convinced of the decrepitude of the democratic nations; and in the years between 1920 and 1939 the recurrence of economic crises, the falling birth-rate, the loss of imperialistic fervour, the decay of national religion, and the general failure of the liberal ideals embodied in the League of Nations, convinced even the democratic nations themselves that something was radically wrong.

### *The Morphology of Cultures*

In Spengler's view, as he expressed it in *The Decline of the West*, the despondency, the lack of zest, the moral, political and intellectual confusion of our time, were symptoms of the exhaustion and senility of a whole civilization. He argued that races and civilizations decline, not because the conditions of the world change, nor because their own waste products clutter up the land, but like ageing animals, in accordance with an inexorable law.

Many of Spengler's observations are indubitably true,

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but although we admit the accuracy of his observations we need not accept his explanations. His prophecy of an age of Caesarism has been fulfilled in Italy and Germany (perhaps in Germany the prophecy helped to create the fact); and we may yet see the fulfilment of his prediction that although the Russian may adapt himself to the tyranny of wheels, cables and rails for today and tomorrow, 'yet a time will come when he will blot the whole thing from his memory and environment'.<sup>1</sup> But while respecting his insight in specific matters, we can still question the aptness of the conception implied in the phrase 'the morphology of cultures'. The parallel with other civilizations is too far-fetched and too full of contradictions to be convincing; and at bottom, in spite of the immense superstructure, the main argument rests on the very doubtful analogy between a civilization and an animal, or between a civilization and a species.

The metaphor involved when we speak of a 'young' nation or culture and an 'old' civilization is so tempting, and within its proper limits so exact, that at times we are compelled to use it; and if we are not careful we go on using the analogy unconsciously and find ourselves committed to conclusions that have no foundation in fact. Nations are neither plants nor animals nor mineral substances; there is no fixed term of life for a State, no standard blood-pressure, no symptom like the decay of eyes and teeth, by which we can say that a nation is aged or ageing. If we call the growth of a powerful bureaucracy a 'hardening of the arteries', we shall be compelled to call Communist Russia 'aged'. If we regard disarmament as a loss of teeth, we shall be forced to say that in the nineteen-thirties the United States were more decayed than Britain.

<sup>1</sup> *The Decline of the West*, Vol. II, p. 504.

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Even if we accept the metaphor, it gives us no reason to suppose that a great expansion of population and income will be followed by extinction.

Nor does the analogy between a civilization and a biological species offer any help. Geological evidence seems to show that species sometimes die out as if from a kind of internal exhaustion rather than from external competition, but there is no general rule. The sea-urchin, for example, seems to have remained unchanged from its beginning as a species, whereas others have changed or disappeared. In general, the species that become extinct are those that are highly specialized or highly elaborated. A species that is highly specialized is lacking in adaptability, and one that is highly elaborated shows a loss of tone in comparison with simpler organisms in which the nerve impulses have shorter and less complex routes to follow. Such species may die out because they are outwitted in the struggle for survival; but even here there is no conclusive evidence that a 'degenerate' or over-complicated species necessarily becomes extinct. Among the fishes there have been species which, having reached an impasse through over-elaboration, have suddenly given up this line of development; the young fish, at the larval stage at which his ancestors went on to develop towards an elaborate armament, takes a different direction, and a new form appears as the lineal descendant of the old.

Even if the analogy between a human civilization and a species were sound, and if the evidence of decay were incontrovertible, there would be no reason to despair. The organism of a society may, in the course of time, become archaic and inflexible, but it is not beyond the wit and will of man to change it. Only if we believe, like Spengler, that society has a life over and above the individuals of which it is composed need we adopt a fatalistic attitude and give

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up the effort. Races die out and civilizations decline, but not in accordance with any uniform law of existence. The histories of the Maya, the Australian aborigines, the Greeks, the Romans, are not alike; and the failure of their civilizations can be explained in familiar physical and economic terms. Sometimes a nation declines because it cannot keep up a national income big enough to support the organization on which it depends; sometimes because it is confronted with another civilization which it cannot hope to equal in productive skill, military power, and intellectual tradition. Some nations have declined because they lacked the power to defend and organize their conquests; others because they had ceased to believe in their own mission. More often, the decay has been the result of a combination of such causes; but there is no inevitable cycle of birth, prosperity, and decay.

### *Other Prophecies of Decline*

'In industry, commerce, and agriculture, there is no hope,' said Disraeli in 1849, when his first brief term of office came to an end. 'I thank God I shall be spared from seeing the consummation of ruin that is gathering about us,' said the Duke of Wellington in 1852, and people smiled at the pardonable exaggeration of an elder statesman. These were the outbursts of a personal bitterness uttered in the heat of party politics, and they cannot rank as serious prophecies of disaster; but setting all such examples aside, it is still true to say that Spengler was not the first to believe that our civilization had passed its zenith, and to mingle well-chosen history and mythology with sharp observation and shrewd comment to justify a vision of despair.

In the early years of the seventeenth century, when the English aptitude for commercial affairs was beginning to

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find an outlet, when the settlement of the English Colonies was still a new and unpredictable adventure, when Shakespeare was still writing and the men who were to form the Royal Society were beginning their studies, aristocratic poets of the old school—Ralegh, Fulke Greville, Wotton—were preoccupied with death and saw decay and ruin everywhere. As their own power of leadership declined and the strength of the merchant classes grew, their pessimism deepened until they scarcely thought it worth their while to write at all. By the end of the century the acknowledged intellectual leaders were members of the middle class, Newton, Milton, Dryden, Locke, writing neither for the Court nor for the masses, but for any educated man.

\* Again, at the beginning of the long struggle with Napoleon, when England had lost the American Colonies and her whole society seemed as corrupt as that which had been overthrown in France, it was widely believed that her utter ruin was imminent. Parliament and the Monarchy were hated and distrusted; agriculture, like trade and industry, was threatened with ruin; the lower classes were openly rebelling against the industrial revolution. Even the signs of prosperity were taken to be marks of decadence. Malthus was preparing to prove that population would soon increase beyond the means of subsistence, and as early as 1775 a writer in the *Morning Chronicle* saw in the growth of the great cities the sure evidence of national decay. ‘It is high time the Parliament should take cognizance of the numerous buildings daily increasing round the suburbs of the city. Politicians of all nations have ever agreed in opinion that an overgrown metropolis was one of the melancholy proofs of a sinking nation; the great scarcity of labourers that has been experienced at our late harvests, may be properly imputed to this cause. . . .’

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But although the eighteenth-century writers may have been wrong when they argued that a rising urban population and a scarcity of agricultural labour were signs of decrepitude, it does not follow that a falling birth-rate, a slackening of industrial development, and a general loss of confidence both in the social order and in traditional morality and knowledge, are marks of health to-day. In some sense the prophets of disaster have always been right. Institutions that they valued were changing, new knowledge was putting old certainties in doubt, new groups or classes were gaining power at the expense of others, and a new order was emerging from the crumbling of the old. When the prophets have stood on the side of the old order, they have generalized from the trivial to the essential, and from their own class to a whole country or a whole civilization, and they have mistaken the signs of growth for symptoms of disease. When they have sympathized with the new order, the prophets have over-estimated the tenacity of the old, and in their passion for revolution they have mistaken the slow, massive adaptation of a whole people for the inertia of death. A nation or a civilization does not change easily, and the pains of growth are often as sharp as those of death, and as long drawn out. Whenever a society is in active growth, it strains and wastes its own vitality and energy, and shows a sharp critical spirit, applied alike to the old order and to every proffered substitute. Whenever a country has the balance and judgement to achieve a necessary revolution without rejecting all that is valuable in its own tradition, it behaves with an immense and terrifying slowness that brings despair into the heart of the zealot.

It is not easy to maintain that Western civilization today is healthy; to maintain that all the changes of our time are

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healthy and progressive is impossible. In some ways the totalitarian states, which have initiated the 'age of Caesanism' prophesied by Spengler, have shown greater energy and resourcefulness, greater unity of purpose and greater confidence in their own destinies than the democracies. But in saying this we must remember that in the long run it was England that best assimilated the revolutionary principles of '89 and absorbed them into her own tradition, even though the English fought a war against them, as they had fought against the principles that found expression in the American Declaration of Independence. There may be something for the democracies to learn from communism and fascism today, just as there is something for them to learn from Spengler's pessimistic analysis; but lessons of this kind are sometimes learned most wisely through struggling against the doctrine in its undiluted form.

### *The Marxist View*

Spengler's outlook, until he modified it in *The Hour of Decision*, was completely fatalistic. He believed that human history was dictated by forces utterly beyond human control, he looked for causes that explained events but would not help us to control them, and he regarded the apparent freedom of choice as an illusion. In comparison with such an outlook, the Marxist view is both practical and cheerful. The Marxist believes that the whole difficulty is economic, and that the prevailing metaphysical, moral and aesthetic doctrines of any age are dictated by economic conditions. Capitalism, he explains, can only flourish on an expanding market; when the capitalist can no longer find new fields for profitable investment, the evils of war and unemployment follow, and with them all the intellectual symptoms of decadence and pessimism. Only a controlled economy,

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based not on investment for profit but on production for use, can hope to escape the cycle of boom and slump, and the political conflicts that follow from the struggle for markets.

A great deal must be conceded to this doctrine. No social outlook can be effective if it cannot be reconciled with a solution of our economic difficulties, and in spite of setbacks the tendency of every industrialized country is in the direction of a controlled economy. Even in countries in which the free competition of capital is identified with the notion of personal liberty, it has been necessary to restrict the field of free financial operation. In the long run the need to feed and clothe the people, and to give them a standard of living compatible with the kind of work they have to do, overrides every principle and prejudice.

But the people of Western Europe and America, as a whole, do not live on the verge of destitution, even if we bear in mind the relatively high standard of living that constitutes 'subsistence' for industrial workers called upon to perform responsible, delicate and complicated tasks. There is a wide margin of luxury, or, shall we say, subsidiary necessity, which, like food itself, may be indispensable but is not determined in kind. A great many different things would do, and the choice may be influenced by something other than purely economic considerations. If everybody were to breed up to the limit of subsistence, then the margin would be negligible and absolute economic determinism would be true. But the very beginning of our problem lies in the fact that they do not, so that these marginal luxuries assume a great importance: it is possible to have two very different societies both based on a co-operative, non-competitive economy.

Again, whilst it is true that the popularity of ideas de-

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pends largely on economic conditions, the economic conditions do not spontaneously generate the ideas; and in practice the human being shows an endless capacity to behave in ways that do not accord with Marxist prophecy. Contrary to Marxist theory, the industrial proletariat has not proved to be a revolutionary class, and communist revolutions have taken place not in heavily industrialized countries, but in those that were backward. The emergence of fascism, the reactions of the *bourgeois* democracies, the failure of Russian economy to achieve equality and freedom or to outstrip the economic development of other countries, all these were unforeseen in Marxist theory. A materialist conception of history can explain these things after the event, but as a basis of prophecy Marxism has been a total failure, and there is no reason to place any confidence in its prediction of the total collapse of Western society.

The Marxist theory, or some equivalent economic explanation, is a necessary step towards the understanding and control of the material symptoms of decline, but a purely materialist conception of history does not explain all the symptoms, and no economic theory will automatically arrest a falling birth-rate or mend an attitude of indifference or despondency. It will not even generate the energy and enthusiasm that are needed if the theory is to be applied in practice. The symptoms of political, moral and intellectual decline must be examined in their own terms: a new economic order may predispose people to accept a new outlook, but the new outlook itself needs to be developed in terms of objective fact and cogent argument, and without that discussion the economic reforms will not serve their ultimate end.

## REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

### *Reasons for Optimism*

There is no reason to believe that we are in the grip of some vast uncontrollable force that will nullify all our efforts, nor is it necessary, even if we accept a Marxist view of economics, to believe that the whole civilization of Western Europe must inevitably decay. The apparent symptoms of decline include the falling birth-rate, the failure to maintain the material progress of the nineteenth century, the failure to fulfil the hopes of liberal optimists, the decay of interest in literature and art, the rapid growth of superstition and odd, naïve religions, and the popularity of doctrines that tell us that nothing is absolutely true, that no action is ever disinterested, and that no effort is worth the making. But none of these are really symptoms of general and irrevocable decay. A century ago, economists were horrified at the possible results of an unlimited increase of population; but the population merely increased step by step with the expansion of industry and the cultivation of new land; and when that expansion slowed down, the birth-rate fell until the population became almost constant. If the present net reproduction rate were to remain unaltered for two generations, the population of Great Britain would be halved; but there is no reason at all to assume that this will happen, and a corresponding extension of the curve in 1840 or 1740 would have given results that were wildly wrong.

Again, the halt in industrial expansion is not the mark of any supernatural disease; we have almost reached the limit of possible development of certain forms of mechanical power; and in future we must change the direction of our effort or accept a slower rate of progress. The fact that there are no new continents to discover and develop is not the

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result of British or European senility; and on the whole, the economic crisis of our time is not a symptom of decay but of adjustment to the new conditions. In this matter, industrial statistics are apt to be misleading, for they tend to measure the present by the standards of the past. Thus the figures that show a relative decline in the British output of steel are unimpeachable, but they fail to remind the reader that the British steel industry has ceased to expand largely because the British have concentrated on the higher, more difficult and more profitable stages of manufacture. Somewhat similar considerations must modify our view of the 'decline' of British agriculture. There is a great deal to be said for protecting the farmer and preserving the rural virtues, but if we are not concerned with the danger of siege, and if our aim is to provide food and useful work for as many people as possible, it pays better to import feeding-stuffs and use the British Isles as standing-room for cattle than it would to preserve a more balanced agriculture.

Whilst frankly recognizing that the British government and the majority of the British people were unduly and dangerously complacent in the years preceding 1939, it is nevertheless important to notice that some of the criticisms we have mentioned are less damning than they appear at first sight. There is, for example, rather less force in the 'average age' argument than is commonly supposed. In view of the great rise in the expectation of life, it is not altogether surprising that the statesmen of modern Britain should be older than their predecessors of a century ago, or than those of Russia, where the normal expectation of life is twenty years less than in Great Britain. Again, the decline of interest in literature and art is not a sign of general decadence. It is mainly due to the weakening of the upper class, who have abandoned their traditional respon-

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sibilities before the newly literate classes have been taught to take them over. The *general* level of taste and judgement seems to be rising a little. We have to remember that a century ago the vast majority of people read practically nothing; to-day the average level of novels, periodicals and newspapers is certainly lower than it was fifty years ago, but the total circulation of reasonably good books and papers is immensely higher. The decay of the older type of responsible journalism has been counter-balanced by the rise of papers which, though aimed at a popular market, do try to get the best instead of the worst out of their readers; and the success of the pioneer who discovered that in England, as in America, there was a fortune to be made by striking unprecedented depths of vulgarity and ignorance, is not likely to be repeated.<sup>1</sup>

Neither in literature nor in science, is this an age of failure. Even if we agree with those critics who maintain that it is too early to judge the merit of what is called creative writing, we must admit that the past thirty or forty years have been a brilliant age of historical and literary scholarship, and of mathematical and physical discovery. In psychology, anthropology and economics there have been advances comparable with the great advance of chemistry between 1780 and 1820; and although the researches of men like Planck, Einstein, Freud and Frazer have in their diverse ways helped to undermine the self-assurance of an earlier age, they are not in themselves reasons for pessimism. Where discoveries have been misapplied, the application can be corrected; where hopes have been disappointed, they can be rebuilt on more secure foundations.

<sup>1</sup> In England, much of this improvement has been due to the B.B.C., which, in spite of the bitter hostility of the commercial press, has stolidly continued to act as an educational force and to present news not as entertainment but as the necessary foundation of sober judgement.

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To abandon illusions that were never based on reality, but only on the optimism engendered by an age of increasing prosperity, is a mark of sobriety, not of senility, and is a hopeful sign for the future.

### *Specific Causes*

To ascribe the diverse movements of our time to occult causes such as the ‘cosmic rhythm’ or the ageing of a civilization does nothing to bring those movements under control; and to reduce the problems of thought and action to a problem in economics will not even generate the moral and intellectual energy needed for economic reform. There is no single factor that will enable us to understand the social malady and cope with it: the main problem is the loss of confidence and determination; and because the efficient causes of apparent decay and lethargy are to be found in the conduct and beliefs of individuals, the problem is complex.

If we confine ourselves to things that are not beyond our observation and control, we find six different factors:

- (i) *The End of Industrial Expansion.* On the one hand we have not yet wholly adjusted ourselves to the conditions of modern industrial life. On the other, such adjustment as we have made has been to a condition of continuous expansion. We have become so used to a growing population, a rising standard of living, and a continuous stream of mechanical invention, that we are quite unnecessarily alarmed by any slackening of the pace.
- (ii) *The Resulting Economic Crisis.* An economy adapted to rapid and continual expansion cannot meet the needs of an age in which further expansion must be increasingly slow.

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- (iii) *The Moral Crisis.* Our willingness to subordinate our aims and aspirations to those of other people has not increased fast enough to keep pace with the growing complexity of industry; and the spirit of individualism which favoured the rapid growth of new conditions is not adapted to the new conditions themselves.
- (iv) *The Decline of the Aristocratic Order.* Together with the privileges which it has been compelled to surrender, the aristocratic order is abandoning its traditional responsibilities. The new democracy is vociferous in demanding its rights, but more backward in accepting the corresponding duties.
- (v) *A One-sided Intellectual Development.* The importance of economic and political changes, and of scientific invention, in the past two centuries has led us to expect too much of economics, politics, and scientific research. We have neglected the notion of quality in favour of that of quantity, we have neglected the sense of purpose in favour of technical means, we have cultivated matter to the exclusion of spirit, and in an epoch of rapid change we have learned to rely only on truths that can be quickly verified and to neglect those that are said to be the product of generations of experience.
- (vi) *The Decay of Confident Belief.* Under the pressure of the sciences, the ordinary man has found the Christian view, with its dogmatic certainties and its emphasis on man's duties and limitations, more and more difficult to accept. In place of it, he has turned to the belief that man is fundamentally good, that he knows the highest when he sees it, and that he is moving slowly and inevitably towards perfection. At the same time, neither this optimistic humanism nor a more strictly

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neutral and ‘scientific’ rationalism is wholly satisfactory. The optimistic view has not been justified by the facts ; and our scientific studies do not strengthen and encourage us by giving us a unified view of matter, life and spirit. On the contrary, they tend to deprive us of confidence by revealing unsuspected (and apparently unworthy) motives in every action and decision.

These factors, and others less important or less obvious, are all necessary in any explanation, for however closely they may be related, none of them can wholly replace the others. Taken together, they are enough to account for the symptoms of our social malady ; and they are neither mysterious nor irresistible. They are ‘scientific’ in the sense in which Spengler dislikes the term : that is to say, they are not beyond control. There is no need to be hypnotized into inactivity by the vast Spenglerian metaphor : even if we accept the truth of such statements as ‘no civilization has ever outlived a period of rationalism’, it is important to realize that ‘scientific’ history, whether in the sense of Marx or in that of Spengler, is impossible, for the human being is not an inert atom but an active and self-conscious creature ; history and psychology can only predict what he would do if he remained ignorant of the prediction. Once he sees his fate he can avoid it, even though he only jumps out of the frying-pan of disease into the fire of sudden death.

Our difficulties are real, but if we wish to master them we can. Even if Spengler were right and our civilization were doomed to decay into an age of dull and senseless tyranny, it would still be more interesting to resist the current of the age than to drift as helplessly as a paralytic waiting for the inevitable end. Whether Spengler is right depends upon our own free decision.

## *Chapter 4*

### THE CRISIS FOR DEMOCRACY

#### *Essentials of a Liberal Democracy*

In America and Western Europe, the great mass of people believe in government through an assembly chosen by universal adult suffrage, and in the right to criticize the government (though not to incite to violence); and they believe that no candidate should be debarred from office by reason of religion, birth, or poverty. In support of these liberal and democratic ideals, they believe in a judiciary divorced from the executive, and in the right of free association for all but violent or criminal purposes; and they have a strong feeling that a liberal and democratic state ought to show a general disposition to defend the weak against the strong, the poor against the rich, and sometimes even the improvident against the wise and prudent.

How much they are prepared to sacrifice for these ideals is uncertain. Many people, who in normal times would not be prepared to make any intellectual effort on behalf of democracy, would nevertheless be willing to sacrifice their lives, and the lives of their friends and enemies, in face of any spectacular threat. Whether these same people would vote for democracy, if they had to choose between sacri-

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ficing their democratic rights and sacrificing their prosperity, is far more doubtful. When people say that they are prepared to defend democracy, it usually means that they would resist a foreign invader; and it does not follow that they would willingly undertake any irksome responsibilities or face any permanent privations to preserve their political system from its own inherent weaknesses.

In the past twenty or thirty years political matters have been more frequently discussed than ever before: energy and attention have been drained away from every other activity; hopes that were once based on the advance of religion, education, or science have been built on politics; and the discussion of foreign and domestic policy has become the main serious activity of the young. And yet, beneath all this intense optimism and activity, there has been a growing current of pessimism, a deepening conviction, not merely that politics is a dirty game or an unhappy compromise between morality and practical convenience, but that democratic government has reached a position of stalemate in which no further advance is possible. The ideals of democratic liberalism have not produced the results for which the early liberals hoped, and the belief that democracy is synonymous with progress, freedom, and good government has been shaken. The anti-democratic revolutions in Italy and Germany have generated a great outburst of enthusiasm and confidence in these countries; they have accomplished economic reforms that have seemed impossible in the democracies, and they have produced in democratic countries a political scepticism which is most marked not among the ignorant and uneducated, but among the products of our higher education.

While admitting that democracy, like any other form of government, has its own inherent weaknesses, it is im-

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portant to notice that many of the 'failures' of our actual democracies are not the result of those weaknesses at all. In the minds of its supporters, as well as in those of its critics, the idea of a liberal democracy is often confused. The essentials of a liberal democracy represent aims rather than existing conditions; and some of our difficulties certainly arise not from the measure of democracy that we have already achieved, but from accidental features of our society—for instance, the party system, the private control of investments, and certain views on progress—that are mistaken for essentials.

### *Democracy, Capitalism and the Party System*

The belief that democracy and *laissez-faire* capitalism are identical is not quite as absurd as some people believe. An economy in which production is governed by profit is certainly a form of democracy in so far as it enables people to choose what goods and services they value most. It allows a certain fluidity and flexibility; it stimulates people to work at the trades that are most in demand, but allows them to work at others provided they are prepared to make the financial sacrifice. In a controlled economy, people could not be allowed to vote every day on the number and kind of newspapers, on the quantity and quality of crockery, the number of new soap factories, and the variety of patent medicines that should be produced. In an economy governed by profit-making, every penny spent is a vote. The doctrine that 'anything is right as long as it pays' can, with a little ingenuity, be represented as the apotheosis of democracy.

But although this argument may go some distance towards justifying the free movement of prices, and may serve to remind us that economic pressure is better than com-

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pulsory labour, it does not touch the essential feature of capitalism, which is not the recurrent and inevitable profit-motive, but the principle of investment for profit, and bankers' control of credit. The economic changes that have already been made without appreciably altering political democracy are quite enough to show that democracy is not identical with the right of property owners to a 'fair' rate of interest on safe investments; and the difference between democracy and financial oligarchy is obvious. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the identification is ever made in good faith, and it would not deserve a moment's consideration did it not recur from time to time in the speeches of distinguished statesmen in both Britain and America.

There are other preconceptions, however, which are more deeply rooted in our history and constitution. When democracy is discussed, it is nearly always assumed that territorial constituencies offer the only possible basis of representation, and that the party system is an integral part of the whole structure. Although trades unions and professional associations are often organized on a democratic basis without any resort to party divisions and territorial constituencies, any suggestion that in national affairs divergent interests might be better served by the nominees of various crafts and sections of society than by representatives of areas is at once dismissed as reactionary or 'fascist'. And in the same way any suggestion that the party system is inadequate is said to be undemocratic and illiberal.

Yet the familiar party system has serious disadvantages. It encourages the elector to vote for candidates not according to their character, ability or public spirit, but according to the colour of their buttonhole. The selection of candi-

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dates is in the hands of committees who control the party funds, and these committees seldom choose outstanding and independent personalities. They prefer faithful party servants, who deserve to be rewarded for long service, or nonentities who will contribute lavishly to the party funds and vote for the party through thick and thin. Over eighty years ago, John Stuart Mill complained that 'At present, by universal admission, it is becoming more and more difficult for anyone who has only talents and character to gain admission into the House of Commons. The only persons who can get elected are those who possess local influence, or make their way by lavish expenditure, or who, on the invitation of three or four tradesmen or attorneys, are sent down by one of the two great parties from their London clubs, as men whose votes the party can depend on under all circumstances.'<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this weakness, the system has not, up to the present, produced any irretrievably disastrous results. The fact is that any system can be made to work; and the political sense of the British and American voters has remained strong enough to work their party systems. At election time they vote for policies, not personalities; but the system allows a few able men to get in who have enough skill to rule their party, and the standard of intelligence and devotion in the permanent civil service of democratic countries is often high enough to stimulate democratic statesmen into greater activity than they might otherwise be inclined to show.<sup>2</sup>

In parliament, the party system, with its apparatus of

<sup>1</sup> *Representative Government* (Everyman edition), p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> The Education Act of 1902, for example, which virtually established secondary education in England, was largely due to the skill, enthusiasm, and pertinacity of a civil servant, R. L. Morant, who persuaded Lord Balfour to introduce a Bill that immediately lost his party a number of votes.

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official opposition, collective responsibility, and alternative administration, has much to commend it; and the history of the French Republic since 1870 plainly shows the shortcomings of a parliamentary system with a less rigid party division. Again, a strong party organization, though it may set a premium on dullness, conformity, and senility, also acts as a filter against freak candidates with some fallacious nostrum which might attract an electorate with no education after the age of fourteen. In excluding brilliance, the system also excludes lunacy.

But the idea of party government is certainly not inherent in the conception of a democracy; and even if the average Englishman and American showed something less than their traditional suspicion of schemes which offer everything for nothing, it is doubtful whether the advantages of a very strong party system would outweigh its drawbacks. For people to group themselves in parties over questions that are fairly closely related is natural and inevitable; but to make undeviating party loyalty a practical necessity for any minor politician, and to create a class of party officials with a vested interest in division and obstruction, is to increase enormously the difficulties of good government. The vices of such a system are responsible for some of the weaknesses of our existing democracy; and the prejudice in its favour arises less from its intrinsic merits than from a confusion of thought about the basis of the party division itself.

### *Progress and Principle*

Broadly speaking, there are two conceptions of history and human nature. In the first, man is regarded as naturally social, pacific, and progressive, and human history is seen as a long, and on the whole successful, struggle

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of the great mass of humanity to overcome the obstructions set up by the few in their own selfish interest. In the second view, man is seen as neutral, or even as evil, weak, and foolish, and such precarious advance as he has achieved is looked upon as an outcome of the heroic efforts of a small but enlightened minority sustained by a stern tradition.

The first view plainly commends itself to the unreflecting liberal, for it encourages him to believe that his task is easy, and that if only the natural impulses of man can be freed from the restrictions of convention and privilege, the good society will spontaneously appear and man will reach something like social perfection. In the same way, the opposing view makes an emotional appeal to the autocrat, the authoritarian and the defender of privilege, for he has only to say that he is one of the enlightened few and immediately his dictatorial attitude is justified. But in spite of these affinities there is no necessary connection between democratic ideals and a 'progressive' outlook, or between the opposing outlook and political reaction. On the contrary, the very fact that the 'progressive' outlook is in some ways natural to the underdog, whilst the other is more appropriate to a responsible ruling class, means that something approaching this classical outlook must become associated with the democratic ideal if the masses are to become the effective ruling class. Too great a faith in man's untutored instincts, too easy an optimism about the spontaneity of social evolution, might well defeat the aims of the democratic movement. There is no reason why a more classical or Tory view should not be combined with democratic aims and with a radical, or even a communist, view of economics.

The belief that the human race was rapidly improving, morally and intellectually as well as materially, was natural

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enough in the nineteenth century. It influenced all parties, and it gave rise to another belief which, though it seldom found a prominent place in political manifestoes, has strongly influenced political thought. This was the belief that all history could be interpreted as a struggle between two parties; the progressives trying to accelerate progress, the reactionaries to retard it. It was assumed that there was only one possible direction of progress, and that political differences could be reduced to the difference between caution and rashness, timidity and enterprise, laziness and energy.

In the period that has just ended, this view was often held, even by the conservatives themselves. They would not admit that they were merely selfish, or temperamentally sluggish, but they could not see any clear principle dividing them from the more active 'progressives'. They took it for granted that progress in the direction of liberal democracy was right and necessary, and they maintained that the statesman's task was to adjust the tempo of the change to suit the evolution of the electorate. Those who called themselves 'moderate conservatives' did not differ from their political opponents in ideas and principles, but only in interest and temperament. They were willing to accept changes demanded by the majority, but they preferred that changes should be made as slowly as possible. They had no standards by which they could decide what they wished to conserve; they merely held on to existing institutions and conditions, including their own power and privilege, and left their opponents to decide what was progress and what was not.

A purely progressive view of history, however, offers no criterion of progress at all. 'Progressive' policy is determined by extending the given curve. Once a change has been initiated—the extension of the franchise, the raising

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of income-tax, the shortening of the hours of work, the provision of social services by the State—all that one has to do is to decide the pace. Anyone can initiate a new departure, and as long as it does not obviously oppose existing movements, it is ‘progressive’. In this way the discussion of liberal democracy becomes complicated by the inclusion of other ‘progressive’ elements that have no connection at all with representative government, freedom of speech, or equality of opportunity. Thus the progressive often assumes that any new movement—especially if it is opposed by some conservatives—accords with his own policy, and his democratic ideas become tied up with propaganda for birth-control, sun-bathing, compulsory sterilization of the unfit, compulsory insurance, vegetarianism, and legalized abortion. At times the assertion of a right is confused with the urging of a duty; and in this way feminist demands that owed their strength to the need for cheap unskilled labour were converted into a moral principle, and ‘progressive’ women first demanded the right to compete on equal terms with men and then came to regard the tapping of a typewriter as a more worthy occupation than the pushing of a pram.

This confusion is only possible in a society which has an almost fatalistic belief that whatever happens is right and that whatever ceases to exist must have been wrong. This optimism has been badly shaken by the slackening of the economic progress on which the illusion of ‘spontaneous progress’ and ‘the natural goodness of man’ really rested; and in recent times there has been a marked reaction towards a more Hobbesian and pessimistic outlook. But when we try without prejudice to apply either of the opposing views to history, it is plain that neither is adequate. Advances in public morality and social organization—even

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those that owe their achievement to popular revolt or to democratic legislation—owe their inception to individuals working in isolation and against the indifference or hostility not only of the privileged few, but also of the masses themselves. And the reformers, inventors and visionaries would never have gained their ends if the masses had not shown some capacity, however slow, uncertain and reluctant, to recognize the claims of truth and virtue when once they found expression.

In aiming at social progress, there is no need to assume that progress is natural and inevitable; and a conviction that it is right to trust other people up to, and beyond, the limit of safety, need not blind us to their limitations and our own. The temptation to take the easy view, and to ignore the difficulty of the task that we have set ourselves, is always strong, so strong that we are inclined to assume that anyone who points out the difficulties is an enemy of our cause. And yet the ‘progressive’ conception of human nature is itself one of the main obstacles to any real progress, and it introduces into politics contradictions that are not the result of any real difference of interest or of temperament or even of principle. It leads ‘progressive’ reformers to stultify their own efforts by basing them on false assumptions, it leads the practical statesman to promise one thing and perform another, and it leads the voter to be surprised and horrified at the results of his own decisions.

### *Contradictions within the Parties*

The position of the democratic statesman is never very happy: he is expected to show courage, foresight and determination, and he is expected to take no action until the whole electorate sees the need for it and is prepared to meet the cost. He is asked to undertake the responsibilities of a

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plenipotentiary, and yet he is given no more than the powers of a delegate. If he dares to take action in the face of wilful public ignorance, he is accused of undemocratic leanings towards dictatorship; if he waits for public approval, he is condemned for inertia and vote-catching. At moments of crisis the democratic statesman is compelled to ask for 'full powers', and sometimes those powers are granted.

At its best, political democracy is an ingenious system by which the electors force themselves to behave with a little more discretion than they might be inclined to show if they did not tie their own hands in advance. They appoint governments whose duty is to look a little further ahead than the ordinary voter and to provide services for which the ordinary voter would never pay directly, or would not pay in time. And to a certain extent the voter is willing to put up with the accomplished fact. There is plainly a flaw in the conception of democratic omniscience, and it is equally plain that the ordinary man has enough common sense to get over the difficulty by waiving his traditional rights whenever his exercise of them has brought him and his country to the edge of disaster. One might say that in recent years there has been something analogous to a trade-cycle in politics—a boom period of democratic assertiveness inevitably followed by a slump in which the elector waits for better times before resuming his political investments. This political cycle might perhaps be avoided if both statesmen and voters would face the problems of leadership; but the mere mention of leadership is anathema to a doctrinaire democracy, and in normal times a democratic statesman stands little chance of coming into office unless he has a glib tongue and a moral faculty that enables him to treat his election pledges as worn-out bus-tickets.

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Not only in democracy as a whole, but also in each of the political parties, there is a latent contradiction. There are positive principles on which a real conservative policy might be based; but in practice a large section of the English Conservative Party and of the American Republican Party has merely resisted the efforts of liberals and socialists and has done its best to postpone the day when action has to be taken. In part, but only in part, this policy of obstruction has been a genuine policy of conservation, based on the belief that the individual ought to be responsible for his own actions and that a nation whose citizens expect the State to help them out of every difficulty will lose the qualities of courage, enterprise and self-reliance. Even in the nineteen-thirties there were some conservatives who could see that a financial oligarchy did little to preserve these virtues. These men were sincere in their attempts to implement a policy of equal opportunity and yet to maintain the principle of individual responsibility. They recognized that the economic changes of the past fifty or sixty years were irreversible; and they knew that international co-operation was not a romantic dream, but a practical necessity. Their policy was both democratic in aim and realistic in conception; but in England they were kept out of office partly through the stupidity and narrow selfishness of their party organization, partly by the threats of Mussolini and of Hitler.

During the critical years before 1940, the Conservative Party, as a whole, was dominated by those who had something to conserve; and what they wished to conserve was not the national heritage of health, intelligence and culture, but their own wealth and privilege. They introduced belated measures of reform in education, but they did not put them into effect. They supported the League of Nations

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for the sake of the pacifist vote, but they would not apply oil sanctions against Italy in 1936. They turned out a Labour Government in 1931 in order to rescue the country's finances, and yet they left over one and a half million men without employment. They allowed Germany to re-arm and establish her ascendancy in Europe; and when at last they engaged in war with her they still failed, in seven months of relative tranquillity, to mobilize the resources of their country. Their predominant loyalty was loyalty to their class, to their party organization, and to an age that was already over.

But if conservatism in practice was a failure, liberalism was little better. The outstanding practical issue between liberals and conservatives had been the quarrel of the free-traders and the protectionists; and after the crisis of 1931 this was solved by the general admission that free trade was desirable and the equally general admission that it was unattainable. The liberals, in their search for a policy to differentiate them from the moderate conservatives, were compelled to borrow planks from the socialist platform. The resulting programme, as Roosevelt showed in America, was not unpractical, though it did not cure unemployment and did not succeed in avoiding yet another slump in 1938. In England the policy was given no trial; and meanwhile the Liberal Party was weakened by its equivocal position and by its inherent contradictions.

The liberal values free speech, free trade, and freedom of thought more highly than the conservative virtue of self-reliance. He is inclined to put a high estimate on people's capacity for self-government, and at the same time he assumes that people are ready to sacrifice their national sovereignty in the cause of international co-operation. He is sympathetic towards the nationalist movements in small

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and subject countries, and yet he is enthusiastic about every proposal for a League of Nations or a Federal Union. He believes that people ought to be allowed do as they like, and also that they ought to co-operate. He believes in decentralization and in the right of secession ; and he also believes in unification and the World State. These diverse convictions are not irreconcilable, and perhaps they are inseparable from any policy that is both generous and realistic ; but as long as these contradictions remain unconscious they make it difficult to maintain a steady and consistent attitude, and it is not surprising that in international affairs the policies that have most conspicuously failed in practice have been liberal policies.

Among the socialists there has been the same confusion. In principle, the socialist is a firm believer in individual liberty, especially in matters of religion and personal morality ; in practice he accepts without question the trend towards urbanization, industrialism and centralization, and merely stipulates that the process must be subject to bureaucratic control under parliamentary supervision. His policies are intended to reform the economic structure so that the national income may be increased ; and yet his arguments have often encouraged the manual workers to believe that they could better their lot by demanding a bigger share of the cake whilst actually decreasing its size by working shorter hours. His faith in progress and in the innate goodness of man is such that he thinks that rising prosperity is normal and inevitable and that there is no need to protect the qualities of application, enterprise and co-operation on which all progress depends. If asked whether a democratic socialist state would generate the energy and provide the initial saving necessary to encourage the apparently unprofitable arts and sciences, he answers that the ordinary

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workman would always be willing to allow deduction from his wages to pay for science and the arts, except in so far as these are *bourgeois* and useless.

In practice, this optimistic view of human nature has not been justified. The pathetic struggle in Spain, a struggle which M. Maritain described as a war between injustice and disorder, showed the inability of the socialist to achieve co-operation and discipline when these demanded immediate sacrifices not from a small privileged class but from the people themselves. The socialist experiments in Mexico, Russia, and the Scandinavian countries, and the abortive socialist governments in France and Britain, have weakened rather than strengthened the socialist faith, not because a socialist economy is impracticable—on the contrary, every civilized country, whatever its form of government, has been compelled to introduce socialist measures—but because socialism has been associated with too many false ‘progressive’ ideas. Only if people are honest, hardworking and intelligent can a socialist economy be made to work; and even in Scandinavia, where one might expect these conditions to be satisfied, socialism has failed to avoid that loss of national vitality and enthusiasm which communist, fascist and Christian alike regard as the weakness of a liberal democracy.

It is not surprising that to many people in England in the nineteen-thirties, politics seemed to be a field for utter despair. Had the liberal and socialist policy of total disarmament been based on willing acceptance of the risks, it might still have been unsuccessful; but undertaken in a spirit of self-delusion it was both unsuccessful and ridiculous. Had conservative policy been based on any firm determination to conserve the national virtues, it might still have obstructed necessary reforms; but being based on nothing

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more than inertia and self-interest it was both obstructive and inept. In France, where personal intrigues and corridor conspiracies made continuity of policy impossible, the situation was even worse; and only the geographical isolation of the United States prevented Americans from seeing that they too were living in a lunatic's paradise. To have faith in democracy in those years called for blind stupidity, or for a deep conviction that under the superficial notions of the 'progressive' age, and under the intransigence and narrow loyalty of the declining classes, the democratic nations still had the courage and resource to face disaster and overcome it.

### *Fascist, Communist, and Christian Criticism*

The fascist condemns the democracies for their inability to face a problem promptly, and for their subservience to financial interests on the one hand and to ignorant and petty opinion on the other. He maintains that a liberal democracy is necessarily inert and spineless, that the energy and enthusiasm that should go to the support of the country as a whole are frittered away on party squabbles, and that no large measure of social or industrial reform and no firm and consistent foreign policy are possible in a country divided against itself. Action is slow, because the sovereign power is vested in the ordinary citizen, who is ignorant and unwilling to look ahead; and it is ineffectual, because the party leaders are more anxious to preserve the party machine and to mollify the electors than to promote the well-being of the country as a whole. The real driving force of a liberal democracy is the desire for individual gain, consequently the private morality of its citizens is such that they are incapable of the sterner virtues and wholly unwilling to sacrifice present advantages for the ultimate common good. A liberal democracy therefore degenerates into

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a set of conflicting interests whose hostility to each other is accentuated and reinforced by their belief that political quarrelling is a dignified and patriotic activity.

The communist, like the fascist, believes that liberal democracy is a political disguise for financial oligarchy and that the democratic ideals of representative government, free speech and equality of opportunity are illusory as long as the rich control the press and influence national finance. The fundamental reality is, he maintains, the struggle between those who own the fields and factories and those who own nothing but their talents and their strength; however sincere the individual may be in proclaiming his devotion to liberal and democratic ideals, in practice the effective actions of each class are the same as if they were dictated solely by material greed. To the resulting struggle for the profits of agriculture and industry there can only be one end: communal ownership of the means of production.

The communist does not attack the notion of property in general, but he argues that the passion for interest-bearing property leads to a continual struggle for markets, and that this struggle results not in the use of enterprise and energy for the general well-being but in economic and military warfare, in chronic unemployment, and in an endless cycle of boom and slump. The evils of war and unemployment are therefore inseparable from any system dominated by the principle of investment for private profit, and since the system is rigid and cannot adapt itself, it will ultimately lead to a collapse that liberal democracy can do nothing to avoid.

The Christian criticism of liberal democracy, as expressed in Papal Encyclicals and in the writings of Protestant sociologists, is no less severe. Whereas the communist attacks usury in the name of economic necessity, the Christian

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bases his attack primarily on moral grounds. Whereas the fascist condemns the secular democracies for their spinelessness and indecision, the Christian condemns them because they are based on false conceptions of moral progress and of human nature. He asserts that our present liberal democracy is wrong in principle because it assumes that man has natural rights and not that he has absolute duties. He says that it will fail in practice (and is already failing) because the pursuit of abstract rights—even the right to self-determination and a living wage—does not, by itself, lead to harmony and order, but to selfishness, disorder, and disillusion. He claims that in so far as the ideals of democratic liberalism are Christian they are contradicted by the practical morality of capitalist society. Liberalism defeats itself because it tries to serve two different moralities at once, and because its lack of a Christian understanding of the nature of man stultifies its Christian aims.

### *In Defence of Democracy*

All these criticisms, it will be noted, are directed not so much against the *idea* of a political democracy as against the existing pluto-democracies. We can admit the force and perspicacity of many of these criticisms, and yet maintain that the faults spring from features that are not inherent in the forms of political democracy. It may be true, as the fascist maintains, that the party system leads to organized and artificially maintained discord, but the party system is not essential to democracy. It may equally be true that the freedom of any society dominated by *laissez-faire* capitalism is illusory, but capitalism and democracy are not synonymous. The Christian contention that democracy needs to be fortified by a strong moral tradition has been justified by the events of recent years, but it need not be

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used as an argument for the total abolition of democratic rights.

Further, it is not altogether fair to urge against the idea of liberal democracy the fact that liberal policy so often failed, both at home and abroad, in the years before 1939. In some measure those failures were the result of bad luck ; the Labour Government in Britain were not responsible for the financial crisis that overtook them in 1931, and the threat of war that broke the Front Populaire in France was not of their own making. Too often the execution of a liberal foreign policy was in the hands of men with no real faith in it and no determination to make it work ; and the weakness of liberal policy in international affairs was due in part to the fact that a liberal government in France seldom coincided with a similar government in England.

Again, the practical failure of liberalism has often been the result of an over-estimate of other people's generosity and foresight ; yet a certain measure of optimism is not wholly impractical and unstatesmanlike. To expect a high standard of patience, understanding and unselfishness, to treat other parties to a contract as if they were reliable and responsible, is the only way to maintain civilized relations. Under the influence of a Hobbesian view of the baseness of human nature, the standard of political relations is likely to deteriorate rather than improve ; and a Christian realism, unless continually illuminated by charity, readily degenerates into unrelieved pessimism. Like the cynical 'realism' of the communist and the fascist, it drives people to behave as meanly and as brutally as the 'realist' expects. 'Confidence is a plant of slow growth' and only confidence begets confidence. The risks and terrifying losses must be accepted. The 'failures' of liberal democracy are not all of them failures of which we need to be ashamed.

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In Britain and America, those failures do not go so deep that we need to envisage revolutionary changes like those of Italy and Germany. A liberal and democratic system calls for a high degree of political sagacity in the electors; it presupposes a sense of national unity and a willingness to recognize that disputes must not be carried to the point at which they put the common heritage in danger; it depends on a clear and widespread recognition of the difference between the authority of argument and discussion and the authority of force. In short, it depends on history and tradition as well as on a fair degree of education and prosperity. In countries that are politically young, it is easy to destroy the factors on which democracy can rest; and modern industrial conditions, together with 'progressive' notions and unintelligent mass-amusements, have done much to destroy the class of independent and responsible workmen who formed the backbone of British and French democracy. But the process is one that could be reversed by a deliberate effort, without abandoning mechanized industry itself, and as the lessons of recent years make themselves still more obvious that effort is likely to be made.

Among the 'progressive' ideas associated with liberalism there is at least one whose falsity has not yet been demonstrated. This is the voluntary principle, the belief that so far as possible a society should not compel its members to act in the common interest, but should leave them free to use their own good sense and public spirit. The democratic liberal firmly believes that in the long run the citizen who is inspired by a tradition of public service is more adaptable and more enterprising than one whose life has been dictated by regulations, and that a liberal society is stronger, and more resilient than one in which school-children, workmen, housewives and professional men have their duty de-

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cided for them and are forced to do it. This belief in freedom is often vague, it can be distorted into an excuse for laziness and disruptive individualism, and even at its best it produces a percentage of failures ; but it has not yet been proved to be false, and as long as a sense of moral responsibility remains it is not likely to fail.

It is quite true that a liberal democracy is not the best form of constitution for the waging of aggressive war ; but the absence of military aggressiveness is not necessarily a sign of decadence. The liberal ideal of international co-operation, and the democratic ideals of representative government, free speech, and social equality, are firmly grounded in Christian morality, and they are well adapted to the needs and inclinations of nations who have a highly developed political sense, set a high valuation on the liberty and responsibility of the individual, and prefer the activities of industry and commerce to those of war. In times of difficulty and danger there is always a contraction of sympathy and a reversion to narrower and less generous loyalties. But to argue that such a contraction represents a permanent revulsion from liberal ideals is to forget the natural resurgence of human generosity after every fit of timidity and narrowness. The reaction against the excessive hopes that were once built on liberalism and democracy will pass, and democracy will regain some of its prestige, provided its political theory can be rebuilt on an accurate picture of the needs and nature of man, and provided that it can solve the economic problems which the communist claims are insoluble within a capitalist framework.

If these economic changes, however, are to be effective, they must rest on a sure conviction of the individual's duty to society. And at this point we must face the choice between the totalitarian conception, in which the well-being of

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the community is itself the ultimate moral standard, and the Christian conception, in which a man's duties to his community are the incidental outcome of his absolute duty to God. The feature of liberalism most open to criticism, and the one that has caused much of our present confusion and disillusion, is its attempt to evade the issue by assuming that all desires are free and equal, that there is a natural and obvious harmony of interests, and that a counting of noses can decide what is good and right. If we can restore a common basis of judgement and purge our political outlook of its utopian illusions, then some of the weakness that the authoritarian detects in the pluto-democracies will disappear.

Because the national income has not continued to expand as fast as it did in the nineteenth century, the optimistic hopes based on that continuous expansion have been disappointed. But the failure has not been political : the original expansion owed little or nothing to political action, and political action cannot be expected to do a great deal to open up new possibilities or to overcome the relaxation of effort that follows a period of prosperity. Apart from conquest and robbery, the only way to increase the national wealth is to work harder, longer or more skilfully. For a time, the individual can prosper by shortening his hours of work, by refusing to have children, and by demanding a larger share of profits from the comparatively wealthy ; but there is a limit to what can be obtained in this way, and it is not the fault of our political structure if we find ourselves near that limit.

It is not democracy that has failed, but our conception of politics. We have tried to produce through political action the results that can be achieved only by moral and physical effort. We have forgotten that the well-being of a people

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depends on its ingenuity, industry and honesty quite as much as on its form of government; and we have hoped to attain a Golden Age not through increased effort and ingenuity, modified and controlled by legislation, but through legislation alone. In international affairs, we have believed that devotion and propagandist enthusiasm would do the work of sacrifice and understanding. We have asked too much of politics; and our disappointment is an argument not against our political institutions, but against our moral and intellectual preconceptions.

## *Chapter 5*

### THE MORAL BACKGROUND

#### *The Loss of Moral Certainty*

A healthy society teaches its children to be generous, truthful, brave, and self-controlled; its schools and universities aim at imparting not only lively ideas and useful information, but also a sense of the reality of other people, an understanding of communal obligations and responsibilities, and a firm conviction of the value of life and effort. In a Christian country these are taught as duties towards God; it is argued that the individual cannot attain the incidental ideals of happiness and self-completion unless he understands the communal nature of man and accepts his obligations with his privileges. In totalitarian countries the virtues are treated as duties towards the State, and the happiness and self-fulfilment of the individual are regarded as incidental products of national aggrandisement. In a purely secular democracy, individual happiness and self-fulfilment are made direct aims; children are taught to be conscious of their right to happiness, freedom and prosperity, and the qualities of courage, self-sacrifice and realistic acceptance of fact are left to take care of themselves.

Our own society, in Britain and America, is a queer and unsatisfactory blend of all three. We teach people to be

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patriotic, but not to make patriotism the end-all and be-all of existence; we tolerate the Christian view of man's absolute obligations, but we limit religious training in the schools to the inculcation of 'religious knowledge'; we are proud of our tradition of freedom, but we do not say that the price of freedom is vigilant self-discipline. Moderation, tolerance and optimism have been our watchwords; and we have retained our faith in these watchwords even when they have stood for moderate honesty, toleration of silliness, and optimism about the behaviour of rogues and the results of laziness. We have reached a state of balance in which patriotic and religious scruples have checked the excess of selfishness, and the passion for individual happiness and gain has modified the fervour of aggressive patriotism, whilst our leaning towards expediency has restrained the fanaticism of religion. Each of our doctrines has served, not merely to check, but also to weaken the others, and in this war of attrition, it has been faith in the individual's right to happiness, and in man's natural goodness, that has lost least ground.

The result has not been an age of conspicuous immorality: on the contrary, the age has been one of intense moral feeling and feverish moral activity. At no time in history has the missionary zeal to reform other people, to remove social abuses, and to impose restrictions on the offender, been stronger than it is to-day. But all this zeal is directed outwards, and it has been vitiated by a profound moral uncertainty, a loss of faith in traditional values, and a growing conviction that one man's code of right and wrong is as good as another's. Morality has degenerated into expediency, and our measure of expediency has itself been uncertain and confused.

The decay of the Christian doctrine of the immortality

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of the soul, with its promise of future rewards and punishments, has not only weakened the force of Christian morality, but also made life, and all the enjoyments of life, seem more precious. If death is the end, then the faith that sustained the Crusader and the martyr disappears. It is not that people are less brave than their ancestors, but merely that they can see nothing to set against the loss of their own lives or those of other people. The individual life becomes too precious to sacrifice : heroism and self-sacrifice become matters for mockery ; and then, in the long run, life itself loses its savour.

The confusion and frustration of our time are therefore not merely public and political, but also private and personal. People who consider themselves advanced and enlightened have tried to base their lives on the ideals of freedom and happiness, and as often as not they have failed in their marriages and in the upbringing of their children. They have not gained happiness by aiming at it, and their pursuit of freedom has brought them no enduring satisfaction. Conscious of their own generosity and enlightenment, they are baffled at their failure ; and they feel obscurely that they themselves may be at fault, but they can see no error in their reasoning and no faith on which they could rebuild their lives. Unwilling to regain their moral certainty at the price of their liberty and independence, they can find no purpose to which they can wholeheartedly devote their lives and energies. They turn to love, but not to the responsibilities of love, and their marriages are failures. They turn to amusement, and find boredom. They detect stupidity, self-interest, or a psycho-pathological condition, in all generous enthusiasm, but they can offer nothing better, and they wait with cynical indifference for an apocalyptic visitation to change the world.

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It would be ridiculous to say that there are many people like this: the great majority of people still retain something of the moral capital of the nineteenth century and are still capable of meeting a crisis with resolution and conviction. But in the past twenty or thirty years an attitude of cynical boredom has been fashionable, and it has infected others besides the idle rich and the talented failure. A kind of moral and spiritual anaemia has penetrated deeper and deeper into society, until it has found its lowest expression in the spineless passivity of popular dance-lyrics. The number of people who have felt this 'disillusion' in its full intensity may be relatively small, just as the number of cells attacked by a disease may be relatively small; but they are people of some importance, intellectuals of the second rank, whose help is needed in the education and criticism of society itself. These people carry on the affairs of everyday life, but without zest. From force of habit they remain reasonably honest and truthful, but they are almost apologetic about their behaviour. They may retain a liking for Mozart, a habit of personal kindness, or a certain squeamishness about conduct that might once have been thought immoral, but they keep these isolated values as so much bric-à-brac—they have no intellectual system holding them together. Neither religious faith, nor the passion for mechanical progress, nor enthusiasm for national greatness, are strong enough to give direction and intensity to their lives: their childhood is free from Victorian repression and severity; their manhood is irresponsible and bored.

### *The Decay of Old Values*

In the past, a vigorous and confident moral attitude has always derived its strength from religion; but the absolute commands and obligations of the religious view of life are

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always irksome, and in the latter part of the nineteenth century Christianity was weakened by the pressure of new forces and new ideas. The Christian view of cosmology was false by the standards of astronomical science; the Biblical story of creation was ridiculous by the standards of the biologist; the miracles of the New Testament were impossible according to the laws of physics. The strictly materialistic outlook of the sciences made it hard to attach any meaning to moral and spiritual notions; the study of comparative religion made it hard to believe that one religion was true and others false; and the psychological investigation of 'spiritual' states relieved them of their dignity and reduced them to the level of pathological problems.

Considerations such as these, however, would not have fatally weakened religious faith had there not been other forces working in the same direction. The growth of science as a profession was one factor: by drawing away men of ability it lowered the intellectual level of the clergy, by giving a new bias to education it weakened the force of moral and religious education. Today the average university graduate understands far more of physical science than of Christian philosophy, and does not know that an intelligent Christian philosophy exists. He rejects the doctrines of religion because he is comparing his childish knowledge of religion with his adult understanding of science, anthropology and politics; he contrasts the simple doctrines that he learned from his mother with the sophisticated polish of statistical mechanics or psycho-analysis, and firmly believes that he is 'thinking for himself'. And what the university graduate does on one level the ordinary schoolboy does on another.

It is not so much that people reject Christian doctrine, as that they pick and choose. They are willing enough to quote

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the moral authority of the Bible when it suits their purpose, but they use it as a justification of their own prejudices ; and these prejudices, which they assume to be natural impulses towards good, are often the accidental product of our commercial civilization. The forces of commercialism, helped by the Protestant tendency to treat the individual conscience as a surer guide than any written precept, have found it easy to twist the traditional virtues to their own end ; and in this way the nineteenth-century spirit of enterprise and self-help has been distorted and exaggerated into an anti-social acquisitiveness that rides rough-shod over every generous virtue.

At the same time, the extension of education has weakened rather than strengthened the force of secular moral training. A parent who is technically less well educated than his children has little influence on their outlook, and in general parents have resigned their duties to the schoolmaster. The schoolmaster is busy cramming his pupils for examinations or training them for profitable employment ; and he is afraid of treading on the religious prejudices of a few bigoted parents. His pupils pick up the mercantile virtues of truthfulness, honesty, and pride of workmanship, by infection from our commercial society, and the other necessary virtues are left to take care of themselves. In consequence, a clear field has been left to the advertiser, whose sole business is to twist other people's sense of value to suit his own ends. There is more money to be made out of motor-cars than out of children, and therefore people are taught to want cars.<sup>1</sup> A married couple with a family and

<sup>1</sup> In Great Britain there were in 1936 2·3 million people with incomes over £250 per year. More than three-quarters of these people owned a car, and on an average they spent £86 a year on its cost and upkeep—as much as it would cost to feed and clothe two children. *Economist*, 16th October 1937, p. 100.

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no car are likely to be happier than a married couple with a car and no family ; but it is no-one's business to tell them this, or to say, as Shakespeare said :

*This were to be new made when thou art old,  
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.*

It is, on the contrary, the business of thousands of highly-paid and highly-skilled agents to argue that the opposite is true, and that material luxuries alone ensure perpetual youth and happiness.

The advertiser does not always succeed in selling his products, but with the help of the film-producer he steadily and insidiously intensifies the feeling that money is the measure of success and that the expenditure of money on luxuries is the mark of culture and social superiority. The virtues and values on which civilization has been based receive no publicity, whereas we cannot walk down the road or open a newspaper without seeing skilled advertisements for imitation silk stockings, cigarettes, cosmetics, photographic materials, beer, radio-sets and cinema shows. With the help of hire-purchase schemes the salesman enables us to appear richer than we are ; he teaches us that this should be our predominant aim in life, and even though we disbelieve all that he says about his own commodity, we still find ourselves tempted to think in his terms and to share his valuation of acquisitiveness and material comforts.

There is always a temptation to do a thing because it can be done, whether it is worth doing or not. The advertiser intensifies this tendency, and by exploiting the possibilities of modern industry he not only breaks up old habits and conventions but also obliterates moral and aesthetic values. In place of private dignity and public service he fosters ostentatious vulgarity, he reduces the trade of authorship to

## NATURALISM AND THE INNER LIGHT

the manufacture of best-sellers, and in place of culture he offers amusement. Under his influence, and in spite of the increasing need for a high degree of technical skill in industry, the old nineteenth-century passion for enlightenment and self-improvement has decayed into a passion for ready-made amusement. Between 1871 and 1937 the number of people employed in British education was trebled, but in the same period the number employed in sport and entertainment rose by 2,400 per cent.

### *Naturalism and the Inner Light*

Commercial materialism is not a very heartening or cheering doctrine, nor does it give us any guidance in the ordinary problems of conduct. Sometimes the arguments of the advertiser rest on the assumption that any kind of conduct that is new and up-to-date is better than any that is conventional and familiar, just as a new motor-car is better than an old one, and sometimes they imply that whatever most people are doing must be right; but neither of these lines of argument would be effective if we did not already vaguely believe that 'whatever is, is right'.

In one form or another, the belief that man is naturally good, or the rather different belief that all desires are neutral and that morality is a matter of convenience and expediency, underlies the personal as well as the political outlook of our time. Man is regarded as an animal, and it is argued that as every animal or plant spontaneously grows to its own completion or perfection, so the human being can live without guiding principles, and can choose between one course of action and another, or between one poem or picture and another, with the help of nothing more than his own intuition or 'inner light'. Whatever is natural and spontaneous is taken to be right, whatever springs

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from convention and imposed habit is considered to be wrong.

This doctrine does not tell us in what sense the use of principles is more unnatural than the use of instinct, or at what point a useful rule of thumb becomes a mere convention. Intrinsically, there is nothing outrageous in the claim that we can sometimes distinguish between better and worse without referring to any outside scale or measure. Any living organism has internal states—hunger, the tone of muscle, general health—which can certainly be measured by outside standards, but can also be experienced directly; and in morals and aesthetics all systems and authorities may be said to rest on the codification of such intuitions. In the naturalistic view, as it is expressed, for example, in the novels of D. H. Lawrence, there is no need for this codification: the intuition is enough. All natural desires are good and deserve to be fulfilled; if some are incompatible with others, the individual must find his own solution of the conflict; if his desires run counter to those of other people, then he must come to terms. The problems of conduct and of taste become nothing more than a calculus of pleasure.

This calculus is not as easy as the simple-minded disciple of self-expression is inclined to suppose; and some of its difficulties begin to appear when we try to apply it to sexual morality. If we assume that all desires are equally good, and more especially if we assume that any impulse towards self-control is an unnatural inhibition, it is quite easy to dress up casual promiscuity in the white robe of philosophical necessity. 'I am sure', says Bertrand Russell in *Education and the Social Order*, 'that university life would be better, both intellectually and morally, if most university students had temporary childless marriages. This would afford a

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solution of the sexual urge neither restless nor surreptitious, neither mercenary nor casual, and of such a nature that it need not take up time which ought to be given to work.'

The obvious and fatal objection to this outlook is not that it is immoral by old-fashioned standards, but simply that it does not work. As an American doctor has remarked, the suggestion that living with a girl isn't going to take up much of a student's time is a fantastic bit of philosophical hokum. 'Nothing takes up more of a man's time than living with a girl.' Promiscuity or 'temporary childless marriages' may be all very well for the eternal student to whom the sexual impulse is merely a nuisance; but to normal men and women, who value love and courtship more highly than they value philosophy, these casual relations become even more of a nuisance than a few inhibitions or an unsatisfied sexual impulse. They lead to trouble with other people, for jealousy is as 'natural' as the impulse to promiscuity; they lead to mutual distrust between the partners, for one of them may get tired of the union before the other; and by hindering the natural growth towards responsibility and parenthood they produce unbalanced and neurotic citizens.

A society can afford a few flamboyant self-fulfilling romantics as a kind of zoo or Lord Mayor's show; but a society of individuals each intent on his own self-fulfilment is inconceivable, for the romantic depends on the toleration, charity and good nature of other people, and these are not qualities that are developed by an education based on self-expression. A romantic as gentle and civilized as D. H. Lawrence sometimes forgets how much he owes to the discipline and conventions he despises. He is so sure of the value and virtue of his own spontaneous impulses that he does not always ask to what extent those impulses are

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really spontaneous and to what extent they are the 'artificial' product of education, example and tradition. He is so sure that man is like an animal, that he does not ask in what way the nature of man differs from that of beasts or in what way his education needs to be different. Often, he is a person of great determination and culture, to whom the initial effort and abstinence needed in the pursuit of ultimate satisfaction have become so habitual that he does not ask at what stage he learned to make that initial effort, or whether other people would ever learn to make it if they were wholly free from discipline.

In the naturalistic and 'progressive' theory of education, the child is regarded as a being who needs only protection from hostile influences in order to fulfil his natural destiny. The difficulty about this view is that man is a social animal and not a plant. A plant can grow to its own completion without the help or example of its own species, the higher animals need the ministrations of filial and paternal instinct, and man needs even more and is still more capable of learning by example what is not given by physical inheritance. Just as one might say that birds and animals have found a way of circumventing for a time the law of gravitation and the laws of chemical decay, so man has found a way of inheriting acquired characteristics. In so far as he can read and talk, he is capable of learning not only from his own experience but also from the experience of other people, the whole of history is his memory, the whole of science is his knowledge. But he has to learn, and he has to learn to learn. He has to establish conventions, habits and inhibitions, and it is easier to establish these early in life. Children are naturally imitative, and a great deal can be done without discipline; but an education based solely on the right to self-expression makes intolerable demands on

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the child. To place the full responsibility for a child's education on the child itself is not an act of gentleness but of adult self-indulgence; and the burden can be incredibly nerve-racking to a child whose perceptions of right and wrong are still nebulous and uncertain. Even the birds have to be 'cruel' to their offspring in teaching them to fly; and we cannot expect a child to grow up into a civilized man or woman without the same kind of pressure and encouragement.

Naturalism, as its doctrines are expressed in the works of D. H. Lawrence, is a reaction against the strain of modern industrial life, and in many ways it is a justifiable reaction, but it offers no practical remedy. As a theory of education it has been a failure, for we have only to look at the products of the 'advanced' schools to see that it produces too many people who are neither happy in the modern world nor capable of building a better. As an attack on intellect and on civilization it is a symptom of *malaise* and maladjustment, but although a gesture of rebellion may relieve our feelings, the doctrine that we should disregard traditional advice and aim at our own self-fulfilment offers neither consolation, guidance nor inspiration. Sooner or later, the disciple of the inner light, even if he does not make a muddle of his life, his tastes and his politics, or make himself, his children and his friends unhappy, loses faith in his own impulses: he no longer feels that his life has any value or importance, and he is compelled to look beyond himself for reassurance and support.

### *Substitutes for a Morality*

To be effective, a morality must be something more than a set of rules or a compendium of past experience. It must be a source of inspiration and encouragement, it must sus-

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tain us in adversity, it must set us an objective even in prosperity, and it must encourage us to renew our efforts in the face of our own failure. Some people do not feel the need for any such conscious and articulate faith, but for most of us there comes a time when the natural vitality and self-confidence of youth are exhausted. At this point, people who have grown up in the belief that the knowledge and wisdom of the pre-scientific age are wholly out of date find themselves in a difficulty. Unable to believe in traditional values, they try to find some aim or purpose whose value is so plainly self-evident that it will act as an incentive and an inspiration, and will provide a standard by which to measure all other values.

One solution is to judge everything by the extent to which it contributes to scientific knowledge. An intense and overriding enthusiasm for their own special study certainly sustains many scientific workers; it excuses them for any lack of moral or aesthetic sensibility; and as long as they do not shortsightedly disregard rules that happen to be rules of prudence as well as rules of morality, they do good work and enjoy the stimulus of difficulty and the exhilaration of success. But for ordinary people who are not likely to enjoy the excitement and fascination at first hand or in their full intensity, this scientific mysticism is not satisfactory; and even for the scientists themselves it often has to be supplemented by some other article of faith—a belief in the greatest happiness of the greatest number, the increase of material goods, the aggrandisement of the nation, or the survival of the human race.

To aim at the greatest happiness of the greatest number is certainly more satisfactory than aiming at personal happiness, or self-fulfilment. But although such an aim can sometimes be a source of inspiration and encouragement, it is

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very little use as a practical guide. ‘The greatest happiness’ cannot be measured, and ‘the greatest number’ is indeterminate. At what point are we to stop counting? Today, tomorrow, or next year? How far must we look ahead? And how can we be sure that some unforeseen contingency will not falsify our calculations? Utilitarianism does not solve the problem of quality: we cannot take ‘the greatest happiness’ as a practical measure of value unless we take a strictly materialistic view of happiness, and recognize only the pleasure that comes from owning or using material goods. If we do that, then the rate of increase of the standard of living becomes a sure guide to the moral health of a nation. This is the basis of strictly materialistic communism, as it is of capitalism; but no-one, not even the most ardent advocate of communist or capitalist economic schemes, really succeeds in convincing himself that an action is good or a painting beautiful in proportion to its effect in increasing the rate of manufacture of vacuum-cleaners. Moral and aesthetic values cannot be eliminated altogether, and the use of materialistic standards merely serves to weaken their influence.

One way of escaping from this difficulty—and one that has been increasingly popular in recent years—is to turn the political ideal of democracy into a moral principle; and, starting from a belief in the natural goodness of man, to go on and say that ‘Whatever most people want is right’. To the young man reacting from an aristocratic or imperialist tradition, or an atmosphere of dour and repressive protestantism, this democratic principle is especially tempting: he finds the traditional values of his class irksome and unsatisfactory; he believes that his class is in decline, and that the future is with the working class. He passes through a stage of romantic anarchy; and then, when he grows tired

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of his new freedom, he looks for leadership and guidance not to any traditional doctrine or authority, but to the habits and wishes of the majority.

The doctrine that by taking a vote we can discover the truth in philosophy, science, or history, is plainly fantastic; it is equally ridiculous in ethics and aesthetics, and to make it plausible we have to cheat. We say that the popular judgement of what is good and right is reliable provided that the public is properly educated. This begs the essential question: what is the measure of good and right? What is a proper education? If we apply the test of popularity strictly and without evasion, we are likely to find that American films are 'better' than Shakespeare, that motor-cars are better than children, that irresponsibility is better than public spirit. In practice, the system measures nothing but the skill of the teacher; and the most skilful teacher is the advertiser. If there is no check on the means of persuasion, people can be induced to vote for almost anything.

Nor is the test of a direct vote conclusive: people have an ingrained respect for truth and virtue, and even if they only read cheap American pornographic magazines they will still give their vote to *Gone with the Wind* or some other ephemeral middle-brow success that is believed to be 'class'. A strictly 'democratic' decision does not really convince the masses themselves. They look for leadership and guidance, and if they are not offered good leadership they will accept bad. If people who ought to be moral leaders accept the decision of the majority, the result is at the best moral stagnation. To know the wishes of the majority is important, but those wishes are not necessarily right or attainable. Often they are as confused and contradictory as popular views on metaphysics or biology, for the popular view on

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any question is never more than a muddled and diluted version of the opinion of people who are respected for their charm, their knowledge, or their wealth. Only in rare circumstances are we likely to come nearer to a consistent, well-informed and active moral view by turning from traditional sources to the great mass of people.

'Democracy', in the egalitarian sense, is not an adequate substitute for morality; it is the elevation of convention and conformity to the rank of a morality. Counting noses is not a system of measuring value, but of measuring effective demand; and what the majority of people want is not necessarily true, or good, or beautiful. A superstition does not become true through being widely held; and an activity such as the publication of inaccurate, trivial and mildly pornographic newspapers does not become valuable through being rewarded by a million pounds and a peerage.

The infection of this mistaken democratic theory has gone deeply into our system; from the stage at which it was a just and self-denying determination to respect the needs of other people, it has developed into a systematic attack on all moral and intellectual authority, and has served to give a spurious dignity to every kind of popular silliness and self-indulgence. No society which substitutes 'mass-observation' for moral leadership and example could long endure; and in point of fact Christian morality has remained the skeleton on which the body of our society is built. Had there not been a lingering recognition that the unprofitable activity is sometimes good, that what is painful is sometimes right, and that the unpopular and uncomfortable view is sometimes true, the falsely democratic doctrine that one man's wishes are as good as another's would have brought disaster long ago.

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### *Totalitarianism*

In the life of a civilized and industrial nation there comes a point at which liberal *laissez-faire*, romantic self-indulgence, 'scientific' denial of value, and pure materialism, all cease to have any real driving force. People are willing to abandon the strict pursuit of scientific thought, to return to old conventions, to sacrifice new liberties, if only they can regain a sense of certainty and value. At such a time they are only too ready to throw away their gains together with their losses, to abandon the burden of knowledge and decision, and to lean on any personality more emphatic and more confident than their own. They look for a leader who will preach obedience, self-sacrifice, and the domestic virtues; and because they have reached their disillusion through ignorance of moral authority they are likely to choose foolishly.

To nations that have never felt a sense of national unity and power, totalitarianism will make an almost irresistible appeal. Scientific materialism and intellectual scepticism have undermined the appeal of reputable religions; and although a nation is in reaction against the sceptical outlook, the sceptical prejudice against familiar and established doctrines will remain. People may want the old wine, but they will prefer to have it in new bottles. Totalitarianism is not really new either in form or substance: it merely extends to the nation the claims that the romantic individualist makes for himself. It puts Wagner in place of Shelley, and in making 'national greatness' the measure of all value it unthinkingly accepts the old criteria of material wealth and military power. But it has the advantage of apparent novelty; for the time being it gives significance to even the dullest of lives; and it can be readily allied to

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narrow and primitive impulses against which the forces of civilization have struggled endlessly and inconclusively.

The totalitarian doctrine cannot be rejected out of hand : it is anti-intellectual, but the intellectual philosophies have failed if they allow it to appear ; it is opposed to any doctrine of the universality of truth and justice, but it does at least replace the narrow doctrines of subjectivism ; it is in some ways coarse and brutalizing, but in others it recalls the individual to a sense of his responsibilities and limitations. It will fail because it cannot make converts without making enemies ; it will fail because of its rejection of logic, knowledge and traditional wisdom ; it will fail because it is false to the vast body of moral and aesthetic intuition. But for the moment it serves the needs of our time, and no doctrine will replace it unless it serves these needs equally well.

### *Survivalism*

The least unsatisfactory of all these substitutes for traditional standards is the doctrine that anything is good provided it helps the human race to survive. Although this doctrine is not often explicitly stated, it is often taken for granted in the arguments of those who try to escape from any narrow or conventional prejudice. There are people who, with varying degrees of wit, assert that the human race does not deserve to survive ; but putting aside all Shavian facetiousness, it is plain that most people want humanity to survive, and survivalism has the advantage that it can be made to fit the findings of traditional criticism. With a little ingenuity we can, on a survivalist basis, produce a plausible argument to show that courage is 'better' than cowardice, that gentleness is better than violence, and even that Beethoven is better than Wagner.

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Survivalism is the ethical and aesthetic counterpart of the metaphysical doctrine of pragmatism. The doctrine that anything is good if it contributes to human survival is persuasive because the virtues and graces have in fact survived. The doctrine that any belief is true if it works is made plausible by the fact that in the long run a knowledge of truth is more useful than a belief in lies. As intellectual philosophies, survivalism and pragmatism are comprehensive and coherent; and as long as people are not insane or suicidal they are likely to believe that anything that has helped the human race to survive is good, and that any belief that has always worked is true. But it does not follow that survivalism and pragmatism are themselves true and useful philosophies. We can use survivalism to justify our respect for Plato, Bach and Shakespeare, and we can use pragmatic doctrines to justify our belief that two and two are four. But it is more heartening to enjoy Shakespeare than to believe in survivalism, and more useful to believe in elementary logic than in pragmatism. Neither survivalism nor pragmatism gives us any help in judging the truth of a new theory, the rightness of a new decision, or the value of a new poem. They merely offer an explanation and a justification after the consequences of our judgement have already become clear. They offer no stimulus to activity and enterprise, and they leave the whole problem of truth and value where it was, except in so far as they create an illusion of finality and put an end to questioning. The survivalist and the pragmatist doctrines fail by their own test: a belief in survivalism does not contribute to human survival; a belief in pragmatism is not 'useful'.

As explanations of knowledge and experience, these doctrines resemble the scholastic science of the Middle Ages. They are logically coherent, and they fit the facts, but they

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do not help us to predict and judge, and they do not stimulate us to any further effort. Why, after all, should we work for human survival? It is only the incidental values—wisdom, courage, kindness—that make survival valuable or even tolerable. How, after all, are we to say that a belief is ‘useful’? However long a view we take, a longer view will always give the prize to slightly different ‘truths’. And why should we take the longest view available save on the strength of some conviction that is not itself a part of pragmatism or survivalism? Human survival, like happiness, is a by-product of the pursuit of other ends: if we aim at it directly, whether for ourselves or for others, and aim at nothing else, we end by making ourselves unfitted to survive. We begin to convince ourselves that we are nothing more than ingenious animals, and the fact that this does not logically contradict our philosophy in no way cheers us. Neither happiness nor human survival is an end that can be attained by aiming at it directly; and if we recognize this fact and try to pursue happiness by more recondite roads, we are already abandoning hedonism for some form of altruism.

### *Sophistication as a Saving Grace?*

Any doctrine that appeals to large numbers of reasonable men must have in it some germ of truth. If we take that germ of truth and let it grow, if we modify the doctrine in the light of reason and experience, we can convert it into sense: self-fulfilment, totalitarianism, survivalism, all these have some basis in human experience and in human needs. If we are patient enough in elaborating them we can arrive at a doctrine that is neither foolish nor degrading. The further we look ahead, the more we take the difficulties into account, and the more fully we consider the intricacies of

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what Freud has called 'the long and circuitous road to pleasure', the nearer we come to a classical conception of life and reason. Utilitarianism, like any other form of hedonism, is a heresy, not a false doctrine. By emphasizing 'pleasure' as the reward of effort it encourages the indulgence of tastes that are easily satisfied. By making no direct mention of the past, or of the present opinion of other people, it encourages us to choose ignorantly and stupidly. By making the aim too easy, it destroys its value. But if it is pursued with intelligence and sensibility it takes us in the same direction as any of the great traditional philosophies.

The same is true of doctrines based on the 'fulfilment of personality'. We are less likely to restrict and brutalize ourselves if we aim at self-fulfilment than if we aim at 'pleasure'; but to avoid the pitfall we need to be long-sighted, and as we take the complexities of the human situation more and more into account we begin to see that we cannot always decide for ourselves what is fulfilling our personality and what is not. We need the company of educated and cultured people, we need the example of athletes, heroes, saints, and sages. If we are to develop our own potentialities, we need help in choosing between one ability and another, and in maintaining a balance and proportion between different activities. If we deprive ourselves of this help, we make mistakes that maim and twist our own development; if we accept it, we are turning again towards traditional authority.

In the same way, the totalitarian doctrine is capable not only of a narrow and brutal interpretation, but also of one that is civilized and generous. If our ambition is not merely to make our own nation richer and stronger than others, but also to earn respect and gratitude, we are already mak-

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ing an advance towards the moral doctrines of religion and enlightened humanism. Totalitarianism is sub-human if it recognizes no authority except that of force, and measures the value of every activity by its contribution to national power and wealth. But if the totalitarian begins to recognize the intricate relation between material progress and moral and aesthetic values, and if he recognizes not only that 'play' may be necessary for material efficiency but also that 'play' must be pursued for its own sake if it is to be effective, then already he has admitted the insufficiency of his own philosophy, and like the sophisticated utilitarian and survivalist he has started on the long trek back to humanism.

By 'humanism' we mean the conception of human rights and duties common to all the great Western philosophies; we mean a belief that human life is something more than a struggle for animal existence, and a conviction that moral, intellectual, and aesthetic authority are as real as the authority of force. Humanism is neither simple, nor fanatical, nor rigidly coherent: it takes its doctrines and its values from many different sources and sets them one against another to limit their exaggeration. But it has the defects of its virtues: it lacks the vigour that comes from a rigid and narrow outlook; and although it has in its armoury the weapons with which it could resist the heresies that try to reduce all values to a single measure, it does not generate the will to use them. The humanist dislikes 'enthusiasm' and missionary fervour; and often he is content to spend his life elucidating some problem of ethics or of criticism without making sure that the prevailing philosophy of the world is one in which his own outlook can survive. He recognizes the authority of scholars, saints, and poets, but he is unwilling to force that recognition on other people,

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and in our age, he stands like Archimedes at Syracuse, too intent on his own problem to see the Roman soldier.

As long as the general atmosphere is one of absolute yet tolerant religious conviction, secular humanism can flourish; it may be the perennial philosophy to which materialism, totalitarianism, and the cult of personality must return; but it remains to be seen whether humanism can survive in a society in which all 'truth' is believed to be relative and all 'values' are thought to be illusory except in so far as they contribute to one supreme end. By standing apart from the absolute and supernatural *credenda* of religion, and by looking upon them as props for inferior minds, the humanist has encouraged doctrines such as survivalism and pragmatism that are imimical to humanism itself. These doctrines have been useful instruments of destructive criticism, they can be used to disprove doctrines and discredit valuations that are suicidal or wholly useless, but they cannot establish any new and positive valuation. We need criteria of positive truth and value; a philosophy that tells us that suicidal beliefs are suicidal and useless beliefs useless, does not fulfil the classical aims of philosophy. Yet some of the most acute minds of our time have concerned themselves with the pursuit of these sterilities. In so doing they have excised their ingenuity, not in adding to our knowledge and experience, and not in deepening or intensifying our sense of significance and value, but in trying to reduce the problems of taste and conduct to problems of mathematics. They have substituted calculation for the exercise of moral and aesthetic sensibility, and they have thereby helped to obscure and blunt that sensibility.

If the moral uncertainty of our age rested only on the contradiction between commercial morality and Christian ideals, the issue would be simple; but loss of moral tension

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derives from something deeper than a quarrel between two moralities and from something more than economic pressure: the intellectual temper of the age is opposed to the notions of 'quality' and 'value' altogether. Because the physical sciences have made brilliant advances by reducing everything to measurement, we have tried to apply the same method in other fields. We have tried to find a single measure of value for morals, poetry, and art; we have tried to reduce everything to the quantitative statements of science and mathematics. The quarrel between Christian morality and the morality of capitalism is part of the endless quarrel between the claims of absolute virtue and those of a narrow-sighted expediency; but general disillusion with all measures of value, and the failure of all but the most rudimentary incentives, spring from something which is a natural, though not inevitable, consequence of our scientific outlook.

## *Chapter 6*

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### THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

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#### *The Roots of Scepticism*

The wars and economic crises of our own time would not have been enough to produce chronic confusion and uncertainty, and the propaganda of the advertiser would not have been able to pervert our sense of value, if the confusion and uncertainty had not been rooted in serious and reputable philosophies propounded in our universities and discussed by learned societies. The ordinary man is contemptuous of philosophers and their works, yet the popular thought of any age, however much it may be influenced by other factors, derives its strength and vigour from some background of serious academic thought. Between the ordinary man and the professional philosopher there is an army of middlemen—schoolmasters, journalists, politicians and novelists. On the one hand, they are the philosopher's reading public; on the other, they give form and expression to the popular sentiments of the age. They give publicity and popular reputation to any philosophy that can be made to lend an intellectual dignity to prevailing sentiment, and in turn they encourage and intensify the sen-

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timents that accord with their chosen philosophy. Among the diverse and mutually hostile philosophies of our own time, those that have found the widest popularity with our intellectual middlemen have all tended to deepen the conviction that people are moved only by material needs, that all 'ideals' of virtue and beauty are illusory and subjective, and that certainty, if it is to be found at all, can be found only in the sciences.

Much of the popular scepticism of our time derives from a praiseworthy determination not to become the dupes of self-interested advertisers, financiers and political adventurers, and from an equally praiseworthy intention not to confuse sentiment and fact, convention and necessity, and not to be deceived by an empty rhetoric of fine words. But behind this once-bitten twice-shy caution there are the philosophical theories of the pragmatists and logical positivists, which put a premium on every kind of doubt; there are the psychological theories of the behaviourists and the psychoanalysts, which lead to a general distrust of all reasoning and all conviction; and there are the politico-economic theories of those Marxists who regard philosophy itself as an incidental product of economic conditions. All these doctrines are essentially sceptical; their aim is to reduce to a minimum the assumptions on which we base our thought.

The proper aim of intellectual speculation is not merely to destroy falsehood, but also to preserve and consolidate the structure of truth. The historic purpose of moral and aesthetic philosophy is to preserve and fortify the sense of value and purpose, and to bring something approaching order and certainty into a region where limitations of taste and aptitude mark off one observer from another, and verification is slow and doubtful. Up to a point, a firm

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determination to make as few assumptions as possible, and to admit no evidence that is not absolutely reliable, is a sign of liveliness and acumen, and is a condition of any progress and even of any stability. Beyond that point—and it is never easy to say when that point has been reached—healthy scepticism merges into a purely cynical prejudice against every confident belief, every generous enthusiasm, and every tradition whose material value is not immediately obvious. Pushed to its limit, this general scepticism must end by destroying even its own foundations and exhausting even its own motive force.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the scientific thought of our age has been an intensified self-consciousness, or one might say, a general theory of the relativity of ideas and ideals. The physicist points out that no observation is valid except for a particular observer; the Marxist asserts that no philosophy is true except for a particular class or a particular period of history; the psychoanalyst detects disreputable, or at any rate involuntary, motives behind apparent altruism. The logical positivist denies the objectivity of beauty and virtue altogether, and at times he has grave misgivings about truth.

To see that our own existing judgements are valid only in relation to one particular problem, or in relation to a limited number of problems, is a necessary part of the pursuit of generality; but the result of our intensive self-consciousness has been disruptive and destructive. In philosophy, it has produced technical investigations that have lost sight of the prime purpose of philosophy itself, and those investigations have acted not as a stimulus to clear and decisive action, a keen perception of beauty, and accurate and objective thought, but as a source of division, doubt, and indecision:

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*Little by little we subtract  
Faith and fallacy from fact,  
The illusory from the true,  
And starve upon the residue.*

Influenced by such philosophies, people have come to feel that nothing is good or true or beautiful except for a purpose that can be defined, and since they cannot define an ultimate purpose they begin to feel that nothing is good or true or beautiful at all.

Plainly this profound uncertainty and deep distrust of all traditional ideals derives from a mistaken metaphysic. If the result of intellectual argument is to discredit intellectual argument itself, if the pursuit of generality leads us to believe that nothing is worth doing, or that one aim is as good as another, then either all discussion is useless, or there must be at some point a flaw in our argument. Some factor has been overlooked, or doctrines that were true in their original sense have been distorted and misinterpreted. If all thought and expression is, as some Marxists assert, a mere by-product of economic circumstance, one wonders why they bother to think and speak at all. If moral and aesthetic doctrine is never more than a disguise for obscure psychological motives, one wonders what motive *this* doctrine itself conceals.

### *The Autonomy of Thought*

Properly understood, the Marxist doctrine that the average actions and beliefs of any social class are dictated by the material interests of that class not only offers a useful corrective to a more idealistic view of history, but also gives us a test by which we can criticize our own convictions. In this way, it resembles psychological criticism, and by forcing us to recognize one kind of pressure that might distort

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our outlook, enables us to evade it. If, however, we misunderstand the doctrine and assume that *all* moral and intellectual ideas are dictated by material needs, then the doctrine itself becomes a source of intellectual uncertainty and sterility. If physical or economic forces work an inevitable chain of cause and effect, then there is no point in trying to think at all, and we might as well abandon ourselves to the current and wait for the material conditions to bring the inevitable millennium or disaster. The most we can expect to do is to accelerate the inevitable changes, and there is no reason at all why we should take the trouble to do it.

But the Marxist doctrine was never meant to be used in this specific sense; it applies to average opinions, not to particular discoveries. Economic needs determine the kind of study that is encouraged in any particular age, but there are always some men who are stubborn and persist in activities that no-one rewards. The popularity of a certain type of theory or a particular kind of poem can be explained in terms of economic forces, but neither the poems nor the scientific discoveries of an age can be deduced from a knowledge of its economic conditions. The ideas, the poems, and the aspirations, of an age are in some measure free: they are creative discoveries, adding to human knowledge something that could not be predicted, and thereby influencing the material conditions themselves.

In one direction, the simple doctrine of material determinism is not material enough. When the Marxist lumps together the theories of psychology and physics and the tendencies of modern literature in order to dismiss them all as marks of a dying culture, he fails to recognize that the physicist, for example, is dealing with objective discoveries. Economic forces may influence the direction of

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the search for truth, but they do not create the specific truths themselves. There is always a basis of non-economic fact, and the business of the physicist and the philosopher is to express this basis as neatly, coherently, and cogently as he can. In his choice of premisses and dominant metaphors he may be influenced by factors that also influence the world of politics and economics, but these forces do not rigidly determine his decision. The facts of modern cosmology are objective, and to some extent they force our theories into a form that fits them. The outlook that has been forced upon us by the material sciences helps to produce the philosophy of the pragmatist and the logical positivist; and we do not dispose of the philosopher's arguments by demonstrating that his outlook is characteristic of the last stage of capitalism. 'The decline of the bourgeoisie' does not explain either the form or the substance of Einstein's theory of relativity, nor do the difficulties of economic liberalism account for Carnap's metaphysics. If, like Spengler and some Marxists, we maintain that a certain type of physical and philosophical theory is always discovered at a particular stage of the development of a culture, we must assume either that physics and philosophy are delusions from start to finish, or else that the atom and the stellar universe have layer upon layer of hidden fact, each layer of a particular type, and so arranged that it will be discovered just when the world is ripe for it. This astrological view is a useless assumption, unsupported by any evidence, and it leads to no result except a general conviction that life is a kind of waking nightmare.

Ideas and theories are based on observation and on argument: they do not automatically change to fit material needs. In choosing between one outlook and another, people may be influenced by material and personal factors, but

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even so they look for a hard core of truth and a certain measure of coherence. A change—even the kind of change predicted by the Marxist—has to operate through argument and intellectual conviction, and unless the argument is firmly based in logic and fact, it will not be effective. To discuss causes that make intellectual beliefs popular may help to weaken their hold, but in so doing we do not dispose of the doctrines themselves nor do we discover any alternative to them. It is certainly amusing, and it may be enlightening, to trace the relation between political and economic conditions on the one hand, and the doctrines of contemporary science and philosophy on the other; but if we are concerned with effective and enlightened action we must ask whether the physical theories fit the facts and whether the metaphysical doctrines serve the purposes of philosophy. And to do this we need to remind ourselves of the nature of scientific truth, and of the proper subject-matter of philosophy.

### *The Nature of Scientific Truth*

In the sciences, the value of a theory is measured by the extent and range of the experiences that it subsumes, by the degree of order and comprehensibility that it introduces among these experiences, and by its capacity to stimulate new activity and experiment. That is to say, the test of 'truth' depends partly on correspondence with experience, partly on coherence, and partly on its inherent vitality and impulse towards development. In such a view, there can be no final truth, for each theory (and the simplest facts are 'theories' in this sense) marks an advance, in one direction or another, on its predecessors and part of its function is to lead to its own development and transmutation. 'Truth' in the sciences is like an animal or a plant, not like an atom

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or a building; it includes an internal impulse towards adaptation and growth.

In weighing one test against another we have no rules to guide us, and the task might seem impossible if the three tests of scientific truth were wholly independent of each other. But in practice the world observed in the sciences is not wholly disordered and incomprehensible, and therefore the 'correspondence' and 'coherence' tests often coincide; and this fact itself stimulates us to invent new experiments in order to find out whether the logical consequences of our theory correspond to experience. The greater the range and order of a theory, the more likely it is to lead to new experiment; and the new experiment sometimes confirms the theory, and sometimes leads to its modification.

Sometimes a simple theory that deliberately ignores a few inconvenient facts is more useful than one that is more comprehensive but also more unwieldy. Such a theory is true only within its proper field; and many of the laws of elementary science, like most of the statements on other aspects of experience, are partial truths of this kind. We sacrifice 'scope' in favour of simplicity, and arrive at statements that are valid for limited purposes. At other times—when, for example, we replace the rough approximation of Boyle's Law by the somewhat less rough approximations of Van der Waals and Dieterici—we sacrifice simplicity for scope; and there are moments when we sacrifice both simplicity and comprehensiveness for the sake of vitality, the power of suggesting new experiment and promoting or maintaining our activity. The general advance of science, as well as its practical value, depends on ringing the changes, and no one of the three tests can wholly replace the others.

The importance of the third test, however, is often overlooked. The scientist adopts as a working hypothesis a

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theory such as Mendeléeff's Periodic Law because it gives a new direction to research; but once the new impulse has been given, the tests of 'correspondence' and 'coherence' overshadow the test of vitality, and so they are taken to be the tests of truth. Even the test of coherence and comprehensibility is sometimes forgotten, and 'correspondence' is regarded as the only test. Yet this view is plainly unscientific: however accurately a theory describes past events, it is of no scientific interest if it does not enable us to foretell the future. That is to say, we are looking for a particular kind of coherence and a particular kind of correspondence; we do not want a theory that is merely a neat device to help us to remember what has already happened; we want one that will enable us to use our present knowledge to deduce something that we have not already seen.

### *Logical Positivism*

Whatever our theories about the nature of truth may be, in practice we use this complex test of truth not only in science but also in everyday life, and many of the discussions of metaphysics are attempts to reconcile the demands of our three distinct tests. When, however, we are doubting the reliability of someone's evidence, it is nearly always the 'correspondence' test with which we are concerned: and at all times there is a strong temptation to talk as if this were the only test, and could always be applied. The doctrine that 'a statement is true if the things named are really there in the relation described' has a bluff common sense that recommends it to philosophers as well as to housewives, and it underlies most of the modern attacks on metaphysics and ethics. In particular, it is the basis of logical positivism. A proposition is true, says the logical positivist, if its constituents correspond to things and relations that can be

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observed ; and apart from tautologies (or concealed definitions) the only truths are those that can be verified in sense-experience.

A healthy insistence on practice and experience has always been characteristic of English philosophy from the age of William of Ockham down to our own time, and unless it rests on an arbitrary limitation of experience it need not be fundamentally unreasonable. It certainly disposes of any metaphysical problems that are merely verbal ; but if we refuse to recognize any experience except that of the five senses, we also dismiss problems that are not verbal, and solve the perennial problems of philosophy by denying their existence.

This is precisely the method that the 'logical positivist' adopts. To begin his work of simplification, he makes a distinction between 'statements of value' and 'statements of fact'. For common-sense purposes, the distinction is useful enough. We all understand what the magistrate means when he says 'Tell me the facts ; don't make moral judgements.' And if we refuse to make use of any experience save that of the five senses (and not much of that) and ascribe no meaning to statements about other kinds of experience, it is obvious that in so far as 'statements of value' are not 'scientific' they are not 'statements of fact'. The positivist then goes further, and asserts that philosophy, like physical science, is solely concerned with this narrow kind of fact.

It thus happens that a philosophical writer can say, with a perfectly straight face : 'A strictly philosophical treatise on ethics should therefore make no ethical pronouncements.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 151. It is only fair to say that in a more recent book (1941) Mr Ayer, who has been a leading exponent of Logical Positivism in England, has gone some distance towards condemning 'the reservation of the word "real" for what can

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The logical positivist quite rightly refuses to escape from this curious position by saying that beauty and virtue can be defined in terms of pleasure to which they give rise, or in terms of the feelings of approval that a person or persons has towards them. He recognizes that no-one really uses words like 'good' and 'right' as if they were equivalent to 'happy' or 'pleasant' or 'psychologically satisfactory'; and he therefore points out that although utilitarianism and subjectivism may be all very well as proposals to replace our existing ethical notions by new ones, they are not descriptions of existing fact.<sup>1</sup>

Having disposed of these doctrines, Mr. Ayer goes on to demolish the absolute view of ethics, which he defines as the view that statements of value are not controlled by the observations of the five senses, but only by an 'intellectual intuition'. He tries to discredit this view by pointing out that what seems intuitively certain to one person may seem doubtful to another. His main argument, however, rests not on these discrepancies, but on deliberate exclusion. He rejects terms like 'good' and 'right' unconditionally, because they are not empirical terms and therefore have no meaning at all. He claims that when we appear to argue about value, we are either making meaningless noises or else arguing about empirical facts, and trying to get our opponent to recognize the same facts as we do, in the hope

be quantitatively measured'. But although he has abandoned some of his more extreme tenets, the fundamental objection to Logical Positivism, whether of the school of Schlick or Carnap, remains: it is an advanced guard of quantitative science, not a philosophy.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Ayer also gives a more curious reason for rejecting the utilitarian and the subjectivist view; he argues that since the absolute view is also self-consistent, the other views are not unique, and are therefore not true. He then rejects the absolute view for other reasons, rather as if one rejected Einstein's cosmology because Newton's cosmology was self-consistent, and then rejected Newton's cosmology because it did not fit the facts.

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that his moral or aesthetic judgement will then coincide with ours<sup>1</sup>

At first sight, this argument is plausible enough; when we are discussing the merit of a poem or an action we often discuss the rhythm of the verse or the consequences of the action in order to be quite sure that our companion fully appreciates the situation we are discussing. But to say that no moral or aesthetic discussion is possible except this clarification of empirical fact is contrary to experience. We do not always abandon an argument when we find a fundamental contradiction between our values and our companion's; we try to see the world from his point of view; we try to find out what it would feel like to accept his view; and it is at this point that our experience of moral and aesthetic philosophy begins. Certainly this behaviour involves something more than logic: it calls for humility, intelligence and sensibility. But it is not contrary to logic, and it is strictly analogous to the attitude of a scientist confronted with a new theory expressed in strange terms. No doubt it is true that some people, when they arrive at an apparent *impasse* in argument, assert boldly that their own values are superior to the other man's, and leave it at that, just as some people, in political or scientific argument, will flatly contradict the other man's description of the facts and will refuse to reconsider the facts themselves. But these are people incapable of learning from experience; they are wilfully blind, they have deliberately stopped their own development, and it is difficult to see what advantage they draw from argument at all, except when they score a logical

<sup>1</sup> Mr Ayer suggests that anyone who doubts the accuracy of his account of moral disputes should try to construct even an imaginary argument on a question of value that does not reduce itself to an argument about a question of logic or an empirical matter of fact. I fail to see how an imaginary opponent can tell us anything we do not know already, or how an imaginary argument can prove anything at all.

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point over someone less clear-headed or less practised than themselves.

Unwilling to submit to the discipline of open-minded discussion, the logical positivist asserts that ethical concepts are not real concepts at all, and therefore cannot be discussed. All that one can legitimately inquire is, he says, 'What are the moral habits of a given person or group of people, and what causes them to have precisely those habits and feelings?' That is to say, ethics is impossible, but we can have psychology and sociology. There is nothing surprising in this conclusion: if we refuse to admit any concept or subject-matter not already included in the special sciences, it naturally follows that philosophy reduces itself to a discussion of the special sciences and their interrelations. Philosophy as an art of enlightenment and persuasion ceases to exist, and we are left with nothing but a heavily mechanized analysis of logical relations, expressed in abstract terms and cabalistic symbols.

### *The Misuse of Analogies from Science*

That such a doctrine should be popular among the ignorant and narrow-minded is not surprising. It gives them an intellectual reason for denying that there is any sense at all in propositions about things outside their own experience, and it makes their moral, intellectual, and aesthetic insensibility a point of superiority over people who waste their time talking of unobservable entities. But its popularity among the younger academic philosophers would be more puzzling were it not for the influence of the physical sciences. The prestige of these sciences has not only inclined us to believe that whatever is up to date is true, and to believe that authority is always wrong and rebellion ('the spirit of free inquiry') always right; it has also given

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us a great many unconscious metaphors and tricks of thought, and it has predisposed us to believe certain doctrines because analogous doctrines are true in the sciences. It has tempted the literary critic to imitate the methods of the scientist, and it has infused the philosopher with the ambition to give his subject the neatness and rigour of scientific proof.

The resulting doctrines are not always consistent among themselves, for the analogies on which they are based are taken from different stages of physics. Thus at one moment we are inclined to believe that we can analyse and discuss all our experience as if it consisted of distinct inert fragments like Dalton's atoms; at the next we remember Heisenberg's Principle of Indeterminacy, and say that nothing can ever be observed without being altered and therefore nothing can be known for certain. Then, turning to the principles of relativity, we notice that no two observers agree, and we argue that no knowledge is absolutely valid except for one particular individual.

All of these analogies can be misleading, and sometimes the metaphysical inference is wholly false. Thus the fact that no two observers agree in their measurements of space and time is no reason at all for saying that all knowledge is subjective, and valid only in relation to the observer. On the contrary, the whole point of the physical theory of relativity is that the observer is wrong, but not the thinker. That is to say, no two observers quite agree in their measurements, but by thinking about them and comparing notes they can arrive at a common formula. The theory of relativity, in fact, is no more than an extension to time and space of the fact that no two aspects of an object are quite the same. A penny, seen from one point of view, is a circle; from another, a rectangle. But we do not, for that reason,

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deny the reality of money, nor do we fall back on the primitive and unhappy practice of looking for a happy mean; a penny is not a square circle, nor is it a rectangle with rounded corners. Instead of denying reality, or looking for a useless compromise, we use the constructive power of the mind to create a concept that will imply all the diverse aspects of a penny, and even those subtle differences of focus that warn us of the solidity of objects. We add a new dimension to the picture, and think of a penny as a solid cylinder.

The physical theory of relativity is not an admission that all knowledge is relative, nor is it a compromise between the views of different observers. It is, on the contrary, a set of equations valid for all conceivable observers, and is therefore a step forward in the struggle for authoritative knowledge. In the same way, although the intuitions and perceptions of different people vary, it is not impossible to reconcile them. The fact that estimates of value vary from one person to another does not prove that all judgements are meaningless, nor does it prove that one man's judgement is as good as another's. The problem of practical science, and indeed of metaphysics too, is not only to construct a common basis of agreement, but also to discriminate between one observer and another, and to decide which estimates and observers are worth reconciling. The history of any science is not merely a succession of brilliant discoveries: it is a long and complex process of eliminating triviality, irrelevance, prejudice, carelessness, and downright imposture. The apparent unanimity of scientific workers is not spontaneous and inevitable; it is the result of the slow establishment of authoritative methods and measures, and this process is bound up with the establishment of the authority of the great scientists themselves.

## THE MISUSE OF ANALOGIES FROM SCIENCE

The problem of authority in ethics is not different in kind from the problem of authority in metaphysics or material science. As we need a critique of scientific workers, to show who is accurate and observant and who is not and to enable us to understand the sources of error, so we need a critique of moralists and ethical philosophers. It is this critique that moral philosophy sets out to provide: moral philosophy attempts to reveal moral truths as physics tries to reveal relations of length. It is less successful than physics because in ethics we are less willing to blind ourselves to 'irrelevant' factors in the interest of simplicity, but it is not a total failure.

In physics and chemistry, and to a lesser extent in biology, geology and physiology, centuries of experience have taught us which things we must treat as important, and which we must ignore. In chemistry we agree that the 'important' thing about the addition of a drop of hydrochloric acid to a solution of silver nitrate is the white precipitate, not the noise that is made, and not the change in taste or smell. We learn what things to observe, and we observe no others:

*If you get a black precipitate  
Which the book says should be pink,  
You wait till no-one's looking,  
Then it all goes down the sink.*

In ethics we have not yet been taught to distinguish between the 'genuine' and the 'accidental' result, and like clumsy and half-trained chemists working with impure materials and home-made apparatus we find that truth is liable to be overlaid with personal interest and prejudice.

Any analogy between philosophy and physical science

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needs to be handled carefully. If the object of moral and aesthetic philosophy were merely to provide a comparative study of divergent aims and tastes, then philosophy could be identified with psychology and anthropology. But we are not merely trying to classify and codify the various ways in which people behave; we are trying to clarify and strengthen our own perceptions of right and wrong, beauty and ugliness; and to do this we may be compelled to use words as if they did something more than represent physical objects and their relations: we may be compelled, like Plato or Berkeley, to use poetic metaphors and analogies. But this is not a fatal objection to our philosophy. The belief that moral philosophy must be as gaunt and bare as a text-book of atomic physics has no philosophical standing at all. 'A close, naked, natural way of speaking' is all very well in the advanced stages of any study, where the fundamental premisses and concepts are generally accepted; but if our object is to arrive at such agreed premisses and concepts, we must necessarily use other methods, the methods of the great aesthetic critics and the great moral philosophers.

Among people who are fundamentally unanimous in their taste and moral judgement, 'moral science' may indeed take the form of any other science, and it can achieve the mathematical precision of axiom and deduction that we find in Spinoza. Such a system may even serve to clarify and reinforce our perceptions, for our disposition to believe that the world is logical predisposes us to believe in any system that is itself logical. If, however, we are not in fundamental agreement at the beginning, then systematization and purely logical argument merely serves to accentuate and clarify differences; by undermining our confidence in our own personal judgement it may clear the

## MORAL AND AESTHETIC ANARCHY

ground for a more objective outlook, but in itself it is purely destructive.

The 'analytical' approach to ethics and aesthetics is essentially sceptical; it aims at removing all that is false, or redundant, or ambiguous. It is thus a useful method of increasing order, but only by a quibble can we say that it adds to knowledge. The sceptical method can help us to detect a latent contradiction or an unnecessary assumption, but it cannot strengthen our will or add to our positive perceptions. To make it the sole legitimate method of philosophy is to assume that we already hold all the possible cards, and that we only need to reject some of them to have an all-trump hand.

### *Moral and Aesthetic Anarchy*

The rigorously analytical philosophies are thus not positive philosophies at all; and like any other form of materialism they tend to produce the conditions they assume. If we reject all terms except those that are used in the special sciences, then we inevitably come to the conclusion that nothing except the special sciences has any meaning. If we refuse to use a word unless it can be defined in terms of physical fact, then we have no language except the language of physics. And when we have firmly convinced ourselves that nothing is real except physical fact, that no method of discussion is valid except the ritualistic shuffling of logical counters, then we find ourselves liberated from the discipline of ethical philosophy and of literary criticism, and our initial assumption comes true: the world of moral and aesthetic 'fact' is a chaos of inexpressible subjective judgement. The latest comic song is as good as Beethoven, Edgar Wallace is as good as Shakespeare, brutality as good as kindness. Unless we try to find some

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guidance in hedonism or survivalism (and to look for this guidance would be unphilosophical) our morals and our tastes must run wild, subject only to the incidental discipline that follows from a knowledge of their causes and their consequences, and to the social pressure that follows when we annoy other people.

To live in this way is certainly possible, at least for a time; but it is highly unsatisfactory. The absence of any moral sanction leads not merely to liberation from particular lines of conduct, but also to a general slackening of tension. If one way of life is no better than another, then no way of life is valuable at all.\* 'Value' we tell ourselves is an illusion; and the concept of 'good' is a pseudo-concept. Soon, we find ourselves liberated from the illusion that anything is worth doing. True, we are left with distinctions of circumstance. Shakespeare wrote one kind of verse, Macaulay another. The imagery of Dante differs from that of Milton. The Borgias favoured one mode of conduct, St Francis another. Technical distinctions of this kind need not be crude and obvious; they can be of real critical value; but they do not help in the sharpening of taste and sensibility unless the reader still believes that some things are better than others. If he becomes convinced that these judgements of better and worse are wholly meaningless, the technical distinctions themselves become pointless.

The demand of the ordinary educated man that a philosophy should embody wisdom as well as knowledge, and reveal significance as well as order, is neither unreasonable nor irrelevant. Our work is to establish judgements that will be authoritative even though they are necessarily imperfect; and to add to knowledge and the sense of value, not merely to shuffle verbal counters according to the rules of logic. We want order for the sake of simplicity and

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comprehensibility, and often comprehensibility and simplicity coincide with 'truth' in other senses; but to let the claims of logical simplicity override those of experience and common sense is to defeat the ends of logic itself. A philosophy of truth that ends by denying truth, a philosophy of value that ends by denying value, may be logically coherent, but its ingenuity leaves it in the world of four-dimensional chess and astrological deductions from the structure of the Pyramids.

Logical language does not exactly fit the world, and we are compelled at some point to sacrifice logic or to admit the limitations of our concepts; but we must try to make our schemes as logical and general as possible, and at the same time we must preserve their initial vitality. The fact that, sooner or later, any intellectual scheme that is carried to its logical conclusion will be found to be either limited or incoherent, is no reason for tolerating philosophies such as Wittgenstein's, which attain complete order at the price of being useless or restrictive. Nor is a vital energetic outlook tolerable if it is demonstrably incoherent and restricted. Our task is to keep all three aims in view, and the problem is not solved by sacrificing any of those aims, though the apparent problem may be simplified.

In the long run, a bad philosophy does not die through its own incoherence or even through its increasing complication, but through its own inanition. And these ways of thought defeat the ends that they profess to serve. They do nothing to fulfil the historic purposes of philosophy: instead of extending human knowledge they restrict it; they lead, not to greater clarity and cohesion, but to greater confusion; they do not increase our understanding of our existing language, but restrict the scope of language itself. They plead for a closer definition of 'truth' and 'reality' in

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terms of experience and action, yet they cut themselves off from any philosophical activity that could lead to better conduct and clearer or more active thought. As R. G. Collingwood has said of philosophy at Oxford in his time, 'the pupils, whether or not they expected a philosophy that should give them, as that of Green's school had given their fathers, ideals to live for and principles to live by, did not get it; and were told that no philosopher (except of course a bogus philosopher) would even try to give it. The inference which any pupil could draw for himself was that for guidance in the problems of life, since one must not seek it from thinkers or from thinking, from ideals or from principles, one must look to people who were not thinkers (but fools), to processes that were not thinking (but passion), to aims that were not ideals (but caprices), and to rules that were not principles (but rules of expediency)'.

Philosophers like Carnap and Bertrand Russell can hardly be held responsible for the vulgarity, ignorance and crude materialism of the newspapers, with their demoralizing advertisements and daily horoscopes; but effective and durable correction can only come through the intellectual leadership that the universities might be expected to provide. The lack of such leadership is in part responsible for the superstition and false religion of the day. A theory of knowledge that ignores all but physical perception, a theory of language that ignores poetry, and a theory of ethics that proposes to be no more than an objective study of material facts, must inevitably lead to the destruction or disregard of every form of criticism concerned with value, and leave its adherents at the mercy of every kind of delusion and bad taste.

## *Chapter 7*

### THE LIMITS OF RATIONALISM

#### *Distrust of Intelligence*

There is a great deal to be said for the acumen of the argumentative Scot, who, when asked ‘You will at least admit that you exist?’ replied thoughtfully: ‘Aye, but in no sense that’ll gie ye a controvairsial advantage.’ To refuse to accept any premiss until you have been told what deductions are to be drawn from it, is not a mark of stupidity or dishonesty, but of shrewd intellectual caution: the meaning of a word is never wholly clear until we have seen the word in operation. At one moment, most of us are prepared to admit we like cats; and at another we admit that tigers are cats: but there is nothing unreasonable or illogical in refusing to have a couple of tigers about the house.

The traditional British distrust of intelligence and logic rests partly on a suspicion of these ambiguities, partly on a conviction that any situation is more complicated than a strictly rational analysis will admit. The strict rationalist regards thought as an activity like the shuffling of counters on a board, or the fitting together of the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. He assumes that all the data are known and

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can be described in finite terms, and that the rules of combination are also known, so that thought becomes merely a kind of superior arithmetic. The Anglo-Saxon dislike of cleverness may sometimes spring from a lack of skill and persistence at these operations, but it also reflects a shrewd suspicion that no real problem of human conduct is quite as simple as the problems of arithmetic and chess. The relevant factors are never fully known, and those that are known cannot always be weighed against one another in any objective scale. Judgement in any matter concerning conduct is nearly always a matter of comparing two incommensurables and allowing for the possible existence of factors that only the future will reveal. It therefore has to be the act of a whole personality, with a due respect for the unformulated wisdom of experience and tradition; and sometimes a wise decision is one that seems to fly in the face of all exact and definite information:

*Our indiscretion sometime serves us well  
When our deep plots do pall.*

The world is always more complex than any equation or any set of syllogisms, and the soundest judge of policy is not always the man who is quickest in naming the ponderable elements and finding a common denominator. Indeed, the finding of a common denominator may be an act of gross over-simplification, and the professed rationalist is often nothing more than a devotee of false simplification.

The rationalist claims that problems of conduct and government are fundamentally problems of intelligence, and that intelligence is a matter of handling words according to strict logical rules. He looks upon any other use of language as a frivolity, and he regards any argument that extends beyond the range of physical observation as so

## TWO ASPECTS OF INTELLIGENCE

much hocus-pocus. He is therefore unable to understand the hesitations and doubts of other people, and still less able to understand their convictions and certainties. He does not regard the capacity to smell a rat as a sign of intelligence; and when he sees other people unwilling to accept his terminology, when they refuse to argue in terms of a vocabulary so chosen that it would lead to conclusions they dislike, he can only ascribe their behaviour to stupidity.

No doubt the British go too far in their reaction against a superficial rationalism: they do not merely regard 'character' as something more praiseworthy than intelligence, they look on intelligence itself as a doubtful asset. 'Clever' is almost a term of abuse, and they seem to believe that while intelligence is rightly expended on bridge and crossword puzzles, it should have no place in poetry or politics. But the fundamental objection to rationalism is not that it is too clever, but that it is not clever enough: as the logical positivist takes too limited a view of 'reality', so the rationalist takes too limited and too simple a view of intelligence, and by handling the entities of thought as if they were so many precise and definite units he ignores the interrelatedness of all that is meant by 'experience' and 'value'.

### *Two Aspects of Intelligence*

There are, in fact, two aspects of intelligence. First, there is intelligence as a unifying factor, reducing confusion to order, handling familiar elements according to known rules. Second, there is intelligence as a disturbing factor, introducing new elements into knowledge. The first is concerned with observations and logical patterns of a familiar type; its discoveries result from conscientious plodding, and provided we accept the premisses, its arguments are rigorous and conclusive. The second kind of intelligence

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involves the detection of new patterns of experience and new types of relationship. It proceeds by intuition and analogy rather than by reasoning; it seizes on elements that are commonly ignored; and it may disregard familiar classifications, not because they are wrong but because some other classification is interesting or useful, just as an airman looking at England might prefer to think of it not as a patchwork of counties, but as a contour map.

In character, though not in substance, the difference corresponds to the distinction between deductive and inductive logic. The unifying or orderly intelligence is safe, reliable and pedestrian. The second kind is disruptive and inconvenient. The first can hardly fall into sudden error; the second is next door to the charlatan and crank. A man of the first type must inevitably go wrong as his reasoning leads him further and further into regions in which the inadequacies of the original conceptions begin to appear. The second may make some brilliant guess that opens up an entirely new field for exploration by deductive logic. The exercise of the first kind of intelligence, which is the kind usually measured by intelligence tests, could be made the function of a machine. The second brings new concepts into existence, and thereby modifies all the existing concepts. It is genuinely creative, and makes discoveries that could not be foretold by any rule of thumb.

To weigh one type against the other, to draw a sharp distinction between them, to say that Cuvier, Darwin and D'Alembert were of the first type, and Galileo, Newton and Dalton of the second, would be useless and foolish. No great discovery has ever depended solely on the manipulation of what is known already, or solely on the intuition of new concepts. But once a new conception is introduced, once its relations with the old conceptions are known

## THE ATOMIC THEORY OF LANGUAGE

and defined, then it becomes merely one more counter for the rational intelligence to handle; and when we look back on such discoveries we sometimes fail to realize that anything more than rational intelligence was involved. When, for example, we claim to teach on the heuristic system, and try to encourage students to make discoveries for themselves, we are not really repeating the experiments of the pioneers. We cheat by presenting our students with the essential concepts ready made and by setting before them the apparatus and material that will lead to a preconceived result. In so doing, we reduce the discovery that once called for 'creative' intelligence to a relatively simple exercise in observation and rational deduction.

For this reason, the second type of intelligence is often overlooked altogether, and the rationalist is inclined to believe that all intelligence is of the first kind, and only of the first kind. An elementary scientific training makes it easy for us to forget that the ordinary reasonable man, when he hesitates to accept an argument because he feels vaguely that there is a catch in it, or that some consideration has been overlooked, may be on the point of making a real discovery of the second kind. By refusing to be kept within the boundaries of a coherent but limited scheme he preserves the possibility of discovery and development. His creative thinking may not be of a very high order, it may be invalidated by ignorance and incompetence in the other kind of thought, but the products of logical thought are often equally trivial and are sometimes invalidated by a lack of that incipient creativeness called common sense.

### *The Atomic Theory of Language*

In strictly rational thought we use words as if they stood for fixed and definite units and relations, and we assume

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that we can move them from one context to another without changing their essential meaning. In order to apply this language to reality, it is necessary, whether in the sciences or in ordinary speech, to think in terms of things that remain unchanged through a variety of changing circumstances ; and when we find that iron loses its solid metallic character on dissolving in hydrochloric acid, we invent the notion of the atom to describe those features that remain unaltered in the chemical change, and we ascribe to it just those properties that will explain the facts we know.

The rationalist mistakes this principle of scientific method for a scientific fact about the world. He assumes that language, morality and the material world are all assemblies like a machine, and that the pieces can be taken apart and put together at will, like the parts of a motor-car, without anything being lost or injured in the process. 'Science', as the Hyde Park lecturer said, 'is the synthetic analysis of the universe.' But although the 'atomic' assumption is necessary as a principle of method, it does not correspond to our experience. Even in the physical sciences our abstractions and distinctions break down if we push them too far, and as we go further and further from our starting-point, the initial grain of falsity infects all our reasoning. The distinction between space and time, for example, seems at first sight to be as absolute as we could wish, and yet it fails us when we deal with the problems of modern astrophysics. The classical concept of an electron is clear and definite as long as we are not too inquisitive, but when we demand precise information about its position and velocity we find that absolute precision is radically impossible, and the classical conception becomes meaningless. The common-sense distinctions between chemistry and physics, compounds and mixtures, solids and liquids, all become con-

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fused and useless if we lose sight of the broad general distinction and turn our attention to the uncertain borderline. It is like focusing a microscope—at a certain point we reach the maximum definition, which is never perfect, and beyond that point all becomes blurred again. If we demand exact definition, or try to focus our attention *exclusively* on one object and ignore its proper context, the object vanishes or becomes unknowable.

We are thus faced with a paradox : we cannot investigate the world unless we assume that it is made up of interchangeable parts that bear a simple relation to each other, and yet the method does not correspond to reality. The world is not a mosaic that we can describe by naming the colour, shape and size of every fragment ; however we make our sub-division, no two parts are exactly alike, the boundaries of a single fragment can never be exactly and finally defined, and no fragment can be fully understood except in relation to the whole of which it forms a part. If we persist in thinking of language as nothing more than a set of fixed and definite counters, we are forced to conclude that everything is one, and that nothing can ever be said exactly.

In fact, however, there are two ways of overcoming this difficulty. In the first place, although the analytical or rational method does not give us an exact copy of reality, it does give a useful approximation for particular purposes. The world is not a mosaic or a machine or a collection of lead shot, but neither is it a clear and featureless soup. If we must use these analogies, it is better to think of it as a very complicated kind of lumpy porridge, a porridge with different kinds of lumps superimposed on each other ; and we can sometimes treat it as a collection of lumps without going far wrong. In the second place, we are not really restricted to the rationalistic use of words. A language is

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not just a set of counters corresponding to ‘objects’ or ‘isolates’; words have their history, their interrelations, their familiar associates; they have latent meanings that can be evoked through their context (indeed, as children, we learn words partly through contexts, partly by pointing); and they can be used to express the complexities of a world that is neither ‘one’ nor ‘many’, but an intricate landscape with features distinguishable, yet merging into each other.

Of such a world, solid yet not unchanging, featured yet not disparate, it is possible to talk sensibly and usefully; but to do so we must use the poetic as well as the logical resources of language. Without the concrete images of parable and metaphor, without the overtones of style and verbal music, philosophy approaches the condition of mathematics, ‘the subject in which we do not know what we are talking about and do not care whether what we say is true’. If we begin to believe that language is meaningless unless it denotes fixities and definites, and that the boundaries between hill and valley must be precise and permanent, we find ourselves committed to anomaly and confusion from which we can escape only by maintaining that either mountains or valleys are non-existent.

The distinctions between matter and spirit, self and other, good and evil, fact and value, time and space, are all approximate and local, and we cannot overcome the difficulty either by denying the reality of one or other of each pair or by trying to transcend the distinction in some ‘higher synthesis’. The business of the philosopher is to preserve a proper sense of the limits beyond which these distinctions become confusing or invalid, to use them to increase our understanding, sharpen our sensibility and fortify our sense of purpose, and occasionally to find new metaphors and new terms that will bring new observation into thought. We

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have no right to narrow the field of inquiry in order to simplify our work, and no right to assume that a given set of concepts is fundamental and ultimate.

The two contradictory aspects of the world are both necessary, and both imperfect. In one, the world is seen as an organic unity, in which nothing takes on its full significance unless it is seen in relation to the whole. In the other, we see the world as a machine, a mechanism that can be apprehended piece by piece. The first corresponds to a poetic use of words, the second to a scientific use; and there is no escape from this dualism, except on the one hand into moments of pure mysticism and on the other into moments of pure mathematics. In everyday affairs, we are compelled to waver between the two; but to see that the two are equally real, and that each has its appropriate language, is to free oneself from the tyranny of the mechanical analogy which in the long run leads to contradiction, and from the futility of the organic analogy, which makes us despair of ever grasping anything. The analytical method, in which we talk of words and things as if they were little hard separate atoms, is necessary to our thought; but the exclusive use of 'atomic' language is a mark not of intelligence but of narrow and mistaken rationalism.

In our own time, the practical value of the mechanical or analytical habit of mind has led to a corresponding weakening of the organic or poetic habit; but pushed to its furthest conclusion, the analytical approach becomes inadequate and turns us back to the neglected aspect of words and things. The logical positivist becomes interested in poetry, the atomic physicist becomes interested in entelechies, the psychiatrist begins to see the essential truth of the religious assertion that the personality is and must be an integrated whole, not a bundle of sins and virtues, ap-

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tites and inhibitions. If we are to guard against domination by the mechanical analogy and the analytical habit, we must turn a little more attention to poetry and the problems of life, and a little less to physics and geometry.

### *Functionalism and Tradition*

In science, the purposes of a theory are usually explicit and precise, and for that reason the scientist can use the neat and definite categories of atomic language; but in the more complicated affairs of life we can seldom be sure that we understand all the purposes that a habit or a doctrine was meant to serve, and therefore there are moments when the vague organic wisdom of tradition is a better guide than rational decision. Tradition is built up through a long and often inarticulate process of trial and error, and precisely because the process is empirical and inarticulate it is influenced by factors that might easily be overlooked in a more rational approach. The needs of man are qualitative as well as quantitative, they are seldom directed to a single, limited objective; and however painstaking our analysis there is always something that escapes a rational definition in terms of function and efficiency.

'Efficiency' and 'functionalism' are attractive substitutes for a blind reliance on custom and tradition, but often they are disappointing, and sometimes they are dangerous. The business of the craftsman is to design tables, garden-rollers and typewriters so that they will serve their purposes well. But the purposes that a piece of craftsmanship will have to serve are often complex, and the craftsman has considerable power over society because to some extent he can decide which purposes are important and so make it easier for the man who buys his work to do some things than others. The architect who thinks that a house should

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have a built-in cocktail-bar, but no junk-room and no odd corners where children can play Cowboys and Indians, is exerting a pressure that is quite as effective as the propaganda of preachers and government departments. Sometimes the pressure is unintentional: the craftsman, through ignorance and inexperience, has taken too limited a view of the purposes that his work is meant to serve; and by abandoning tradition has produced a work that is less useful than one built in quite uncomprehending imitation of a long-familiar model.

The same difficulty is found in literature and art: a rational theory of poetics may well enable the poet to do one part of his work better than he would otherwise have done; but if the theory itself is too narrow—and all aesthetic theories are too narrow—it may undermine his confidence at just those moments when his work is most valuable. If one function of the artist is to see more than the scientist sees, and to serve purposes that are alien to the existing special sciences, then any attempt to make his work ‘functional’ in terms of scientifically definable purposes must end by eliminating just that element of perception that justifies his work. For the novelist to build up characters according to the formulae of the psychologist is futile: such characters are illustrations to an existing text-book and not the raw material of new research. The endless complexity of man always defeats the psychologist and the economist; but the novelist who accepts beforehand the limitations imposed on the scientist has abandoned all claim to be anything more than a scientific journalist. Science succeeds in giving a high degree of order to its subject-matter because its purposes are narrow; and it makes accurate forecast possible in a restricted field. But the artist aims not so much at forecasting events as at pre-

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paring the mind of man to accept and recognize events, and therefore there is a point at which he may need to throw his science overboard and trust to tradition or, still more desperately, to his own intuition.

To say this is not to say that explicit knowledge is inimical to tradition. In the short run, it may be. Many people, forced to swim, or build a house, or write a novel, at short notice, may do it best without any guiding precepts from the critic or the scientist. But in the long run, the aim should be to absorb all these precepts, to pass through a stage of conscious recognition of particular purposes, to a stage at which all this 'knowledge' is incorporated in a wider knowledge called 'wisdom'. And because life is short, because we cannot recapitulate all the arguments and counter-arguments of our fathers, we need in the end to fall back on tradition. A tradition is not alive unless it is subjected to rational criticism—*on ne peut pas porter partout le cadavre de son grandpère*—but it cannot be replaced by a finite set of purposes and precepts.

Tradition is always an easy mark for the contemptuous humour of the narrow-minded rationalist, for often its wisdom is expressed in language that pays no heed to the demands of scientific thought. But to 'expose' a traditional belief without replacing it by one that will serve the same purposes equally well is not a step towards enlightenment, but a reversion to barbarism. A community which is firmly convinced that the ghost of a man who does not pay his debts will be haunted by the ghosts of his creditors may not be very sophisticated; but at least it is more civilized than it would be if it abandoned that belief altogether without making honesty a public virtue. And even if we successfully replace the old traditional belief by an abstract doctrine more in keeping with the scientific outlook, there is

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always the danger that something of importance may be overlooked.

### *The Hierarchy of Existences*

The real objection to rationalism, when it is put forward as a substitute for religion, philosophy and poetry, is that by interpreting the whole in terms of the part, and the complex in terms of the simple, it necessarily interprets 'higher' elements in terms of lower, and thereby loses the significance of the higher.

To the thoroughgoing rationalist, this distinction between 'higher' and 'lower' is purely technical. In his view, all facts are strictly equal, and the most reliable (and therefore the most fundamental) are those that can be most exactly stated and most closely incorporated into a rational scheme. Yet the distinction between 'higher' and 'lower' is rooted in biology and psychology—the higher forms of life are not merely those that show the greatest complexity and appear latest in biological history, nor are the higher impulses merely those that appear latest in human evolution—and the use of the terms 'higher' and 'lower' is not a mere casual use, as it is when we speak of higher and lower frequencies in sound. The higher existences and experiences reveal new potentialities in the lower, and give to the lower a new significance and value. To say that the world of life is higher than the world of inert matter, and that the world of spirit, or morality and value, is higher than that of unselfconscious life, is not only a moral judgement, but also a strictly scientific statement.

In the sciences, however, we necessarily talk of the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar, the complex in terms of the simple, and we try to understand things that are new or different in terms of analogies from things we know well.

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And because we naturally attack the simpler problems first, it follows that the old and well-established sciences are those that deal with parts of our experience which can be most easily described in terms of 'fixities and definites'. Using the methods and concepts that have been familiar in these fields we go on to map out regions that are more complex and ill-defined. Thus we find ourselves trying to describe living things in terms of chemistry and physics, thoughts in terms of physiology, and ethics in terms of psychology. Because the worlds of matter, life and spirit are all real and are related to each other, we are partially successful. We fail only if we refuse to modify our 'lower' conceptions to fit the 'higher' facts.

The danger is that we may come to think that the things that are relatively simple and discrete, and therefore readily demonstrable, are more 'real' than those that are more involved. We may find ourselves saying that a cat contains 80 per cent oxygen, 12 per cent hydrogen, 6 per cent carbon and 2 per cent nitrogen, calcium, and iron, and then unconsciously assuming that these constituents form the whole reality of a cat. Or we may analyse the concepts of ethics and religion in terms of psychological impulses and inhibitions and then go on to say that the inhibitions and impulses are real and objective, the moral and spiritual facts illusory and subjective. In the sciences we try to exhibit the world as a sequence of cause and effect and to describe complex situations in terms of simple elements, and it follows that our scientific outlook cannot directly reveal any 'purpose' in the world. The 'purpose' of human history—if it has a purpose—will appear as a series of obstructions in the development of a scientific scheme; it will be a set of events that could not have been predicted in the light of our previous knowledge. And each time we en-

## HIGHER DRAWS ITS ENERGY FROM LOWER

counter such an event, our aim as scientists must be to reduce it to the level we already know, even if we can do this only by re-interpreting the known antecedents.

If we are ingenious enough, we can always offer an 'explanation' after the event; but sometimes the explanation is one that could not have been made beforehand: the event or the experiment itself brought to light the 'causes' that we use to explain it. Thus the atom that we use to explain the facts of chemical valency and ionization is not the simple atom that Dalton used to explain the Law of Definite Proportions. It is a new conception, invented to fit the facts. To deny 'higher' facts, merely because they present new difficulties, is sheer obscurantism; it may be a practice of dogmatic rationalism, but it has no place in scientific method.

Viewing the matter in this way, we see that in spite of their apparent opposition to each other the notions of free will and of a divine purpose in history are closely related. A divine purpose, in so far as it is a 'higher' element (in the sense in which we are using the word 'higher'), necessarily reveals itself through events which, like the manifestations of free will, are unpredictable. Both are gaps or failures in a scheme of rigid material causality: they do not in general contradict the lower laws, but they produce effects that could not have been predicted on the basis of these laws alone.

### *The Higher draws its Energy from the Lower*

As the living creature draws its substance and energy from inert matter and stamps them with a purpose or pattern that could not be predicted from the study of inert matter alone, so the spiritual world draws sustenance from the world of life and infuses it with a value over and above any biological purpose or pattern. The lower conditions

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determine some of the conditions of a higher existence (a living creature does not contradict the laws of chemistry or physics), but the higher existences themselves throw a new light on the potentialities of the lower elements.

It follows that a proper understanding of biological purpose and of spiritual values must rest on two approaches, the first starting with the concepts of physics and chemistry, the second starting at the other end and discussing life and the inert world in terms of spiritual value. The analytical approach, which discusses the restrictions placed on the higher elements by the lower, and only occasionally modifies the lower conceptions to suit the needs of 'higher' fact, is necessarily the more readily amenable to the methods of rational argument and atomic language; but it does not follow that the opposite approach, which reveals the significance and purpose of the lower elements, is necessarily irrational. The world of moral and aesthetic value is nearer to the world of life than it is to the world of inert matter, and therefore it is better described in terms of organic analogy and metaphor than in terms of mechanism. The methods of poetry and parable are better suited to this work than are the methods of scientific argument, but rational argument is still possible provided we are prepared to face difficulties even greater than those we meet in physical and biological science. If what we want is system, then plainly it is best to start with those things about which there is the widest measure of agreement and with which we can most readily experiment; but if we allow our use of the analytical method to hypnotize us into the belief that life is 'nothing more' than chemistry and physics, and that spiritual reality is 'nothing more' than the product of biological factors, we are erecting a useful but limited methodological principle into a metaphysical fact. Because the worlds of

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matter, life, and spirit, are intricately connected, the two approaches do not, in the long run, lead to contradictory results. Only if we artificially simplify the difficulties of the analytical approach by denying the 'higher' realities does the method become restrictive and disheartening, for in so doing we eliminate just those elements that make life significant and valuable.

### *Psychology and Scientific Humanism*

It is just this, however, that we are tempted to do if we take the analysis of the higher in terms of the lower to be the only useful kind of intellectual activity, and accept the atomic language of the sciences as the only possible language for true and useful thought. The relative difficulty of the opposite approach has led us to neglect not only moral philosophy and rational theology, which try to organize our moral and spiritual knowledge into the systematic formulations of atomic language, but also poetry and parable, which make use of those properties of words which most accurately reflect the nature of moral and spiritual perceptions. Yet the need for a sense of purpose and an understanding of value remain, and therefore we try to build up a substitute for the moral and spiritual view. We attempt to give a scientific basis to religion and poetry, or we try to infuse a feeling of moral significance into the facts of evolution and natural selection, and we try to find among purely material and biological concepts a principle that will guide us in our own conduct.

These attempts are not wholly unsuccessful, for, as we have seen, there is a continual infiltration of higher elements into our scientific concepts, and this infiltration, together with an effective (though technically illegitimate) infusion of feeling, enables us to produce a palatable substi-

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tute for spiritual nourishment and guidance. A prejudice in favour of human survival, or of happiness, or the rapid consumption of material goods, is allowed to creep in, and it is then assumed that if we use scientific methods to further these ends there will be no need for theology, ethics, or aesthetics.

A strictly scientific humanism would admit no such prejudices, but in practice some such prejudice is the foundation of every rationalistic substitute for religion. Thus the psychologist sets out to discover a 'normal' pattern of human life and (making a momentary lapse from purity) he sometimes assumes that what is normal is desirable, and that what is desirable is good. His primary business is to note and classify the ways in which people behave or can be made to behave; but in the course of his work he meets gross eccentricities and departures from the average. If he is a psycho-pathologist, his patients come to him because their own conduct brings them pain and remorse, and they wish to be restored to a less painful state of thought and feeling. In such a case, the psycho-pathologist can prescribe a regimen of health without reference to any ulterior standard. He takes 'the normal functioning of the organism' as a criterion, and often his treatment is successful.<sup>1</sup>

But although this standard is useful in dealing with abnormalities that are obviously painful and unprofitable, it does not necessarily offer useful guidance to society as a whole. We do not want a world of normal people, nor do we want to 'cure' our geniuses, our saints, and our social reformers; we want to preserve the flexibility and variety of

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes when the psychoanalyst succeeds in 'curing' his neurotic patients, he removes not only their abnormalities, but also their special gifts. Poets and mathematicians who have been 'cured' in this way have sometimes lost not only their eccentricities but also their special aptitude. They have become happier and more placid people, and at the same time they have become less valuable citizens.

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society and to know which abnormalities are valuable and which degenerate; and at this point a purely psychological criterion of 'normal functioning' is very little help. A full understanding of 'the normal functioning of the organism' in relation to every individual would involve a knowledge of the ultimate purposes of that individual; and the ultimate purposes of consciousness, will, and aesthetic discrimination, are not clear in the way in which we can say the ultimate purposes of an oak-tree and all its parts are clear. The whole point about the self-conscious animal is that he becomes miserable if he is not convinced that his life is directed to some end beyond himself; ethical philosophy attempts to reveal this end or to reinforce the conviction that there is such an end; and in so far as the psychologist recognizes this feature of consciousness, he leaves the traditional field and method of his subject and recognizes something other than 'scientific' fact.

The successful practitioner of psychotherapy usually admits that even in dealing with the obviously unhappy and abnormal he is using something more than a strictly psychological criterion of health. Either he accepts the common standards of society and tries to adjust his patient to social life, or he puts his psychological knowledge at the service of his own moral and aesthetic judgement, or else he tries to discover what are the deepest moral convictions of his patient so that he may strengthen them by laying bare the source of actions and impulses that do not square with them. In none of these methods is psychology providing a standard. Any criticism of his own standards, or those of society or of his patient, is incidental and trivial, like an agricultural chemist's 'criticism' of the composition of a plant.

Between psychology and ethics, as between life and inert

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matter, there is a vague and uncertain border-line; and there is continuous interaction between man's higher impulses and those that the psychologist regards as fundamental. But when people say that ethics can be 'replaced' by psychology, they mean not merely that the higher is related to the lower, as life is related to matter and turns it to its own ends, but that the higher can be understood in terms of the lower, and that we need only to know the lower to deduce the higher, as if we could deduce an elephant from the facts of chemistry. They do not notice that although there is no clear distinction of subject-matter between ethics and psychology, there is an important difference of direction. To the psychologist the distinction between 'higher' and 'lower' impulses is purely technical—the higher impulses are those that have appeared latest in human evolution and show the greatest neural complexity—and his business is to explain the working of the 'higher' impulses in terms of simple and rudimentary forces. The aim of the ethical philosopher, on the other hand, is to emphasize rather than obliterate the distinction between higher and lower, to decide which impulses are indeed higher, and to turn the lower forces to their service. If we try to replace this activity by a strictly egalitarian study, we tend to destroy our sense of value and direction.

### *Rationalism in Life and Politics*

Behind every rationalist scheme there is the assumption that some aim—the happiness of the individual, the world-community, the survival of the human race—is obvious and universal, and that the individual, were it not for his ignorance and bad logic, would grow towards that aim as naturally as a tree. The rationalist takes for granted the natural goodness of man and the natural harmony of aims: he may

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not agree with other rationalists as to what those aims should be, but he is firmly convinced that ignorance and stupidity are the only ultimate sins, and that they can be overcome through effort. If only people knew a little more physics and chemistry, a little more astronomy and a little more psychology or economics, if only everyone had a copy of the great Wellsian encyclopaedia and knew how to use it, then all would be well.

If all our quarrels—or all our more important quarrels—arose from misunderstanding or stupidity, then the problems of life and politics would be intellectual problems in the simplest sense. Perhaps this might be true if our understanding of human nature could be infinitely deep; but speculation about the infinite seldom throws much light on international conferences or on the proceedings of the divorce court; and in practice, whether in public or private affairs, we are too ignorant to say that quarrels only spring from ignorance and unreason. When the rationalist asks his wife or mistress to be ‘reasonable’ about his secondary love affairs, he is ignoring ineradicable human instincts and asking her to behave in a way that will suit *his* personal comfort and convenience, and satisfy *his* preconception of a quiet and moderately self-indulgent life. In politics, although a great deal of quarrelling does spring from ignorance, far more comes from the obstinate clash of interests and temperaments, and from a positive liking for quarrelling and invective from which the rationalist himself is not exempt.

The real problem is to adjust the diverse claims of personal liberty, industrial efficiency and social order, to allow for the diversity of man, and to decide what kind of power and authority belongs to each citizen; and this is a problem of comparing and co-ordinating qualities, not weighing

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quantities ; it is a problem of ethics, not of mensuration ; and it cannot be solved by setting up one criterion to override all others. We need an organic conception of society, a conception that will reveal the duty of the individual to society and of society to the individual, and a conception of this kind cannot be made explicit in purely rational terms. Mr. Wells is instinctively right when he presents the case for his utopian World State in the form of imaginative novels : he is unconvincing when he assumes that there is no conflict between the claims of social efficiency and self-determination, and that the need for peace, prosperity and order can provide a measure that will replace all the traditional wisdom embodied in humanistic and religious culture.<sup>1</sup>

To be alert and healthy a society needs something more than peace, prosperity and order : it needs a sense of purpose that will be at once a source of confidence and a stimulus to further effort. It needs a dominant conception that will keep all subsidiary enthusiasms within bounds, and will offer something of the simplification and exhilaration that people find in war, when the common purpose sanctifies even suffering and humiliation and gives a new significance to every life and action.

No amount of reasoning will give us this confidence and sense of purpose. If we go beyond the premisses of the rationalist and admit, not only that war and political confusion are bad, and that the aims of one person or one class or one nation ought not to conflict too violently with those

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that in his utopian novels Mr. Wells usually endows his ruling class with scientific skill and knowledge, endless energy and considerable courage; he is inclined to take public spirit and common honesty for granted, and he has little use for patience, humility, and tact. His heroes usually seize power through craft and violence, and he has a curious confidence (or is it merely hope?) that in the long run these violent and crafty men will be wiser and more generous than our present democratic rulers.

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of another, but also that the individual, both as a citizen and as a private person, needs some conviction that life is significant and effort valuable, then we have a basis for pragmatic argument. We can show that it would be an advantage to value certain things and to prefer some kinds of conduct to others ; we can show the social and personal advantage of certain beliefs about the nature and duty of man ; but reasoning alone will not persuade people to feel these beliefs and make them the spring of action.

When people say that they do not know the purpose of life or do not see the use of struggling, they are not really concerned with an intellectual question at all. They are asking for reassurance, a sense of value, a renewed capacity for suffering and enjoyment ; they are asking for some infusion of zest or vitality, and often they can find it in a holiday, or a love affair, or a change of occupation. But in so far as their disillusion and loss of vital potential went hand-in-hand with a mistaken intellectual analysis there is a need for still more intellectual work, and we cannot do this work properly if we consistently define the 'higher' in terms of the 'lower'. Reasoning is always needed, and rationalism is not enough.

## *Chapter 8*

### THE SENSE OF VALUE

#### *The Need for a Sense of Value*

Like any other living creature, the human being clings tenaciously to life: he is at his weakest and his zest for life is least, not in adversity and hardship, but in prosperity and safety. In time of difficulty he is on familiar ground; hunger, cold, disease, and danger only serve to bring out ancestral courage and endurance; and he does not question the purpose of life and the value of effort. But once he is assured of food, shelter and security for himself and his family, he begins to look for some aim beyond his own self-preservation. As soon as he is relieved from the bare struggle for existence, as soon as his obvious desires and needs are satisfied, he begins to look for a purpose in life. He asks for excitement, for intensity of experience, for the possibility of gains and losses, and he proposes to himself all sorts of solutions: music, war, and literature; pigeon-racing, bridge, and politics; religion, beer-drinking, and scientific studies. He learns to value things that have no obvious use —a rose garden, a Beethoven symphony, sunrise over the Finsteraarhorn, and he may even come to value them more than he values his own life.

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This sense of value, this conviction that some activities are good and some things beautiful, is as much a part of our experience as any physical fact; and it is *necessary*. We need not only to understand and criticize our aims and convictions, but also to maintain our general sense of the purpose and value of existence. We need to clarify our vision and to come to terms with other people; and at the same time we need to preserve our conviction that our own individual life is significant and that our actions matter. We can and must use our reason to show that some 'values' are false and dangerous, that some are illusions born of personal weaknesses, and that others are worth pursuing even though they demand an initial effort that seems to be hard and unrewarding. This work of tidying our moral and 'aesthetic' perceptions is never easy, and there is always a strong temptation to give up the effort and to blame the subject-matter. Because it is hard to arrive at any authoritative judgement, we are tempted to say that all judgements are personal or parochial, that nothing is really good and nothing beautiful. The natural inference is that nothing is worth working for, and that our own actions have no value or significance.

The more leisure a man has for reflection, and the farther he stands from the pressure of immediate necessity, the more likely he is to fall into this state of boredom from which he can recover only through a renewed effort of thought, or through a new experience, or through some misfortune that brings him back to the simpler problems of existence. And what can happen to an individual can happen to a whole society. Prosperity and security are not unmixed blessings; and unless a prosperous society has set itself aims beyond its own attainment (so that in one sense it is not prosperous at all) it is apt to fall into a state

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of lethargy and *ennui* from which it can be redeemed only by renewed effort or a great disaster. The very intelligence by which it overcame material difficulties becomes an instrument for the destruction of its own sense of value. Religion and philosophy are analysed in terms appropriate to the lower sciences, 'explanations' flourish, and strong enthusiasms, whether moral or aesthetic, decline. All the devices of criticism, which are meant to strengthen and clarify the sense of value and purpose, are used to expose shams and falsehoods; under cover of an attack on false values, an intellectual method that takes no account of value is used to attack the notion of value itself; and people are left with no object to which they can devote themselves, no purpose beyond the satisfaction of their most elementary needs, no reason for exercising courage, patience, or self-sacrifice.

Iconoclasm is not a system of architecture. A generation brought up to expose shams, to detect falsehood, to revile the ugly, the grandiose, the pretentious, the vulgar, may do some very necessary demolition; but unless their training also teaches them to detect the element of truth, they cut the ground from under their own feet and bring their world tumbling about their ears. If a youthful enthusiasm for truth is narrowed into hatred of falsehood, then the endless intricacy of a world in which justice is always infected with injustice, and altruism can always be shown to be a form of selfishness, will leave them with nothing at all to believe, nothing at all to admire, and nothing at all to love.

### *The Political Attack on Value*

The methods of the logical positivist and the rationalist are not intended to produce this effect, and yet in practice it is often the result of their doctrine. Their methods of argument are excellent weapons of destructive criticism, but

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they are universally destructive, and they leave their exponent with no source of satisfaction except in his own skill and in the extent of his 'disillusion'. He feels himself to be superior, and yet unhappy. He regards all heroism and all disinterested effort as so much silliness, and in place of any moral belief that could give direction and value to his life he sets a platonic and unfruitful passion for scientific research and a fatalistic belief in some future political cataclysm.

More often than not, he takes little interest in individual people; their cheerfulness and confidence irritate him, for they are marks of ignorance and thoughtlessness. He is aware of his remoteness from other people, and from time to time he unreasonably suspects them of hostility and dislike. He knows that his own position is unsatisfactory, and he ascribes the failure not to any error or omission in his own thought, but to the world at large. Emotionally, rather than intellectually, he finds himself pushed in the direction of communism, and he uses his intellectual talents to show that the aims and outlook of the present social order are in decay and dissolution.

But his argument does not stop at this point. The attack on 'bourgeois values' begins as a sincere and intelligent attempt to distinguish between values of general authority and those that are nothing more than devices for protecting the material interests of a special class at the expense of other people. Within its proper limits this attack is part of a genuine critique of value; but when we read of 'the bourgeois values of courage, prudence, toleration, thrift and foresight', it is clear that *all* virtues are being attacked, not merely those that are the marks of a special class or those that are given a peculiar twist through the social position of that class. An attack as general as this is directed not

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against one particular social order, but against the whole basis of social existence, for no State—capitalist, socialist, or communist—can exist without a basic confidence resting on each man's sense of obligation to his neighbour. If such an attack is effective, it must end not merely by destroying the individual's confidence in the value of his own life and activity, but also by reversing the whole trend of social development, weakening the power of defence against an external enemy, and undermining the will to political and economic reform.

If the political reformer or revolutionary is convinced that the existing social order is corrupt and senile, it is fatal for him to assume that *all* values are therefore corrupt. His business is to replace the existing governing class, not to bring the whole structure into ruin. He must attack false loyalties, not the notion of loyalty itself; he must cultivate the sense of social responsibility rather than weaken it; he must stress the fact that a new order is developing rather than the fact that an old order is in decay.

### *Value as a Means to an End*

The sense of value and purpose is necessary for survival, whether individual or social, and yet it ceases to be effective if we regard it solely as a means to an end. If we play football or take country holidays solely in order to keep fit, we destroy part of the value of these recreations; and if we see a purpose behind any activity or belief there is always a danger that we may destroy the whole value of the activity or belief through sheer false reasoning. We are tempted to say that because the activity serves some useful and valuable purpose, the purpose may be valuable, but not the activity itself.

This curious conclusion—which is by no means uncom-

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mon—comes from an interesting combination of vanity and bad logic. We find that we were moving unwittingly towards some end that we had not foreseen, and because it is sometimes foolish to act in this way we assume that it is always foolish. We feel humiliated because we did not see where we were going, and because we feel humiliated we assume that the direction was wrong. We fall in love, and then we reflect that falling in love is part of a biological process—a kind of trap set for us by Nature—and we therefore check ourselves or set to work cynically to extract what enjoyment we can and yet cheat our mythological enemy, Nature, of her price.

The whole of this argument is fallacious. The fact that a thought or an emotion or an action serves some purpose beyond the one we had in mind at first, does not prove it to be worthless from either point of view. To show that we were moving unwittingly towards an end does not prove that we were acting foolishly. To fall in love, to be by turns exhilarated, proud, shy, awkward, serves a biological purpose, but it is not merely a biological necessity. It is an experience valuable in itself.

Yet we cannot aim at it directly without destroying its value. To know all about the experience in theory before we know it in practice can be a dangerous sophistication; it can lead us to despise ourselves for being subject to natural law, and to believe that we can make an arbitrary distinction between agreeable excitements and the natural pains and penalties. The first reaction springs from a romantic desire for an impossible kind of 'freedom', and it ends in one kind of 'disillusion'. The second springs from a false conception of the way in which the world of pain and pleasure holds together, and it ends in another kind of weariness and disillusion.

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But the 'illusion' that produced our disappointment is not the one we take it to be. Our mistake is in thinking nothing valuable unless it is out of the order of nature, and in thinking that pain and pleasure, freedom and responsibility, can be wholly separated. We have tried to think of the world in terms of a view that does not fit. The analysis of life into ends and means, pains and pleasures, restrictions and opportunities, is necessary; but it becomes false if we imagine we can abolish one and keep the other, or if we think that ends are valuable and means are worthless. It is often necessary to have an aim; but the reward, the justification, is found incidentally, and it is equally foolish to despise the incidental satisfactions or to mistake them for ends in themselves.

Falling in love, leading a revolution, and founding a colony are all in their way purposeful activities, and the fact that they are purposeful activities need not make them less agonizing, exciting and enjoyable. Because they lead to consequences beyond themselves, they cannot be indefinitely pursued as ends in themselves, but their results can never be wholly foretold. Seen in retrospect, they can be viewed as acts of biological or historical necessity, but in themselves they are acts of choice that create the order that is afterwards seen to exist. The fact that our actions, whichever way we decide, will afterwards be seen to fall into a chain of cause and effect, is no reason for choosing one way or the other, nor is it a reason for despondency or inertia: one might as well refuse to take pleasure in eating or sleeping or breathing on the grounds that these are 'mere biological necessities'.

In point of fact, they are not. Few of us eat merely to live. we choose our food and enjoy it. To reduce the act of eating to a process of taking in so many calories, so much

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protein, and so on, is not only unhealthy, but also silly. The human being has contrived to make a great deal more than that out of gastronomy, and gastronomy cannot be reduced to the simpler and cruder science of dietetics. In the same way, love cannot be reduced to a purely biological conception, even among the animals. And if a human being is brought up to believe that it can be, he is cut off from most of the advantages of humanity. Modesty, humility, adoration, archness, timidity, are not merely digressions from the straight and narrow way to reproduction, they are devices by which man has added to the grace and dignity of life. And the fact that the great crested grebe has done the same does not prove the great crested grebe to be a fool suffering from effete and unbusinesslike illusions.

### *Expediency and Value*

Just as some people find themselves unable to believe or to enjoy anything wholeheartedly if they find that their belief or enjoyment would serve some ulterior purpose, so others react in the opposite way and try to make everything depend on expediency. They ask what is the use of listening to Schubert's B Flat Trio or climbing the Meije; they buy iodized butterscotch, all-glucose barley-sugar, and peppermints filled with stomach powder, in the belief that they are 'doing themselves good'. They talk of abolishing slums in order to reduce the nation's bill for ill-health. They refuse to admit that anything is good or enjoyable in itself, and they try to assess every value, serious or trivial, in terms of an expediency which in turn is measured in terms of physical well-being, national income or human survival.

There are two cogent objections to this view. First of all, it is silly. The sucking of peppermints, the construction of decent houses, the enjoyment of music or physical exercise,

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are all activities that are good in themselves, and as long as they do no positive harm there is no need to justify them by their consequences. Secondly, when this outlook is applied to the higher values, it frustrates its own ends. By reducing spiritual conceptions to the biological or economic level we not only destroy their intrinsic value and diminish the value of life itself, we also frustrate the biological or economic aims that we have in mind.

The attempt, for example, to base the virtues of honesty and truthfulness on social expediency, leads in the end to hopeless confusion. It is quite true that honesty, though not necessarily a good policy for a clever man who aims at wealth and power, is nevertheless the essential basis of a commercial civilization. But if we replace the belief that honesty is right by the doctrine that it is socially expedient, we undermine the confidence on which social and commercial relations must rest. A strictly materialist conception of history which says that all men are, and ought to be, guided by self-interest, may throw a good deal of light on the past and offer some help in forecasting the future, but it cannot be accepted as a guide to conduct.

It might be said that the materialist acting from a sufficiently enlightened self-interest would be honest, because honesty pays; but by placing the emphasis on what pays instead of on what is right, he is inclining himself for an ultimate piece of dishonesty, and therefore leading people to distrust him. If he has no intention of ever being dishonest, he might as well admit that honesty is right whether it pays or not. To be honest for a time, in order to indulge in unexpected knavery, is futile; moral capital can only be accumulated slowly, but it can be lost by a single action, and it is much harder to build up a second time. A reputation for duplicity, whether among men or among nations,

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is a serious disadvantage: to fail to maintain a standard is one thing; to claim that the standard is only a means to an end is something very different. Opportunists, whether of the school of Machiavelli, Marx, or Hitler, can prosper as long as other people remain honest and straightforward; but with each success they damage the confidence on which they were parasitic; and they must end either by destroying confidence completely or by reforming themselves and coming to see the necessity of the view they have destroyed. It is characteristic of the higher values that they are weak in terms of the lower: they expose the believer to new possibilities of exploitation and deception, and their survival always seems precarious or impossible. And yet in the long run they have the power to turn the lower forces to their own ends, and to emerge unbroken after each set-back. An opportunist ethic based on 'lower' and purely biological conceptions, defeats its own aim; an absolute ethic does not.

The virtues of courage, good faith, and kindness, and all the higher values of morality and art, can be justified in terms of expediency and survival; but we can seldom use this test until long after the need is past, for these values help to create the new conditions in which they themselves survive. Only tentatively and indirectly can we use the fact that the highest values happen to be those that wear best in the life of the individual and the race. Thus we can reasonably say that many of the 'values' of contemporary society are acutely unsatisfactory: they wear out too quickly, they produce too much incidental misery, they stunt the development of higher values, and they tend not to preserve the race but to exterminate it.<sup>1</sup> But we cannot say that the

<sup>1</sup> The sins of the fathers have always been visited on the children, even if the results did not appear until the third and fourth generation; but now, as a result of the increased tempo of modern life (for example, in

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higher values are valuable *because* they endure for a long time, or because they preserve the race or develop all the varied faculties of the individual. It is not merely that our knowledge is too limited and the calculation too complicated: the difficulty is fundamental. Survival and social efficiency are ends that we cannot attain without a general conviction of the value of life and effort, and we cannot arrive at this conviction merely by asserting that life and effort are valuable.

### *Intrinsic Values*

There is a fundamental paradox in the nature of value, just as there is a fundamental paradox in the nature of things and of language. Nothing has its full significance alone, and yet in order to reason logically we need to treat things as if they could be isolated and still retain their reality, significance, and value. The meaning of a word is partly intrinsic and partly derived from its context; and in the same way the value of an action or a thing depends partly on its occasion and context, and partly on itself alone. The world of value, no less than the world of matter, is incurably organic and interwoven; but just as we are compelled in science to treat the physical world as if it were a mechanical contrivance of bits and pieces, so in ethics and aesthetics we are compelled (in so far as we reject the methods of poetry and parable) to talk of values as if they were intrinsic and discrete.

If our belief in any kind of value is to be effective, we must treat it as if it were valuable in itself, apart from any consequence. Values must be 'disinterested', like an animal's play. It is difficult to discuss these matters with a foreign affairs), they are often visited on the offenders themselves, so that principles that were once matters of morality are now matters of prudence.

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kitten, but as far as we can see, a kitten does not play with a ball of wool in order to keep fit or to become a proficient mouser; and if play were made a strict matter of professional training it would become a bore. 'Play' is the outcome of natural high spirits and zest for life, but it is also the cause and occasion of that zest for life. The human being can use his intellect either to strengthen or weaken that zest, and if he reasons badly and overlooks the complexity of the problem the consequences may not be those he set out to produce.

In practice, we cannot reach any of our major aims directly. If we want 'survival' and 'social efficiency' we must find something that will justify and sanctify life and all its suffering and ardour, and we must pursue this aim as if it were more important than 'survival' and 'social efficiency' themselves. If we are to preserve life, we must make it valuable, and if we are to make it valuable we must be prepared to sacrifice life itself. Nothing can transform and magnify the value of something else unless it is felt to be more valuable than the thing itself.

This necessity of sacrifice is not merely a matter of theological or ethical dogma, though it is essential to all religion. It is a fact of common experience. The man who aims directly at personal happiness and refuses to run the risk of misfortune and disappointment does not become happy. The restraint and dignity of the gentleman, the sacrifice of the soldier, the saintliness of the martyr, all depend on rejecting an obvious gain on a lower level for the sake of something on a higher level. It is not for the sake of 'honour, power, and the love of women' in any simple sense that a man sacrifices his life. The road to martyrdom is not part of 'the long and circuitous road to pleasure' as Freud understands it. These gratuitous sacrifices are at once

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a demonstration of the value and worthlessness of life. They show that to some people there is a price at which life is not worth having, and that man is not merely an animal at the mercy of material appetites and the instinctive impulse to go on living. We may choose to regard such people as abnormal and perverted, we may regard them as stubborn creatures unable to adapt themselves to new circumstances, but the fact remains that it is they who live with the greatest intensity and find most zest in life, and it is their example that gives a value to life for other people. The reckless arrogance and generosity of the aristocrat and the unswerving courage of the saint may be the outcome of a profound confidence that their class or their faith will survive; but their insistence that their own values are absolute, and not relative to any personal need, gives a significance to their lives and a force to their actions that cannot come from any faith in 'life' itself.

### *The Confusion and Conflict of Values*

All this may be admitted by the rationalist and the sceptic, and yet he may maintain that the realm of value is so confused that it is impossible to be certain of anything. We have only one man's word against another's that humility is better than pride, that Haydn is better than Berlioz, and Dante better than D'Annunzio. The rationalist argues that unless we can define some objective and quantitative measure and reduce all comparisons and assessments to a matter of measurement (as the physicist reduces colour to wavelength), we cannot confidently make any such assertion at all.

Every attempt to define a single purpose that will justify the specific values and virtues is intended to provide such a measure. And every attempt fails, for it rests on the as-

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umption that values are quantitative and can be compared like bits of string or pennies in a purse. Values are stubbornly qualitative, and even if we try to reduce them all to ‘happiness’ or ‘satisfaction’ we find that one kind of satisfaction cannot be measured against another. The pleasure of idling in the sun is neither greater nor less than that of listening to the Kreutzer Sonata, and we cannot compare the sonata with the pleasure of saving a man from drowning or watching our children grow up. There is a time and place for all these ‘pleasures’, and if we say that some are ‘higher’ than others we are drawing a metaphor from biology and evolution, not from physics and geography.

If we are to compare different values, and to reduce the confusion and contradiction to something like order, we must find a common measure that is neither less complex nor essentially lower than the things we are trying to compare. Unless we are talking in terms of some such organic and spiritual measure, it is as absurd to say that humility is better than pride, or Haydn better than Berlioz, as it is to say that flowers are better than leaves. There are moments when we have to choose between one virtue and another, and one enjoyment and another: the claims of fortitude and prudence do not always coincide, nor do those of charity and truth; the values of the arts sometimes seem to oppose those of morality, and the diverse claims of justice and social order lie at the root of half the political quarrels of the world. Any act of choice must be the decision of a whole personality, not the operation of a machine; and the standard itself must have the complexity and dignity of a personality—it must be the least common denominator, not merely the highest common factor.

We cannot hope to arrive at any authoritative judgement of values and yet leave out of account our awareness of

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people and personalities. For absolute and certain knowledge the standard would need to be more than human : it cannot be some lower standard taken from the biological or the inorganic world. We cannot define such a standard, but we can at least point towards it. We are all capable of recognizing personalities superior to our own : we can look towards the saint or the hero or the scholar, and make use of their judgement in solving our own problems. We cannot in this way dispose of all our difficulties, and we cannot hope to reach absolute certainty, but we can go far enough towards authoritative judgement to speak with the limited confidence of the scientist and to escape from the morass of anarchism and subjectivism.

This use of authority is no more than a matter of adding other people's experience and judgement to our own. We can test that experience and judgement in our own lives ; but the process of trying to live entirely without guidance and without any preconception of human aims and purposes is too painful for us to wish to commend it to future generations. Our experiments in independence and scepticism may help us to detect and reject some false valuations, but if we carry them far enough they end by showing the necessity and rightness of traditional judgements. However great may be the discrepancies between Plato and Aquinas, or between Coleridge and Hume, they stand on common ground ; and if we apprehend them not as 'systems' but as personalities we can use their experience and their thought, not as evidence of the hopeless anarchy of human judgement, but as a source of confidence and energy.

### *The Sense of Value and the Sense of Purpose*

It is doubly true to say that we can maintain or recover our sense of value only through submission. We cannot find

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a durable value or purpose in life by working alone and ignoring the reality of other people; nor can we find a useful standard of comparison and judgement as long as we retain the scientific habit of rejecting any standard that has the complexity of a human personality. If we are to regain our confidence and vigour, we must admit that however useful the analysis of higher in terms of lower may be in one way, it is worse than useless in another; and at the same time, we must accept new obligations. A sense of value not only gives us an appreciation of the world and of life, it also imposes responsibilities.

Perhaps it was to escape these burdens that we began our Odyssey and tried to find a substitute for the sense of specific values; but the burdens are inescapable. There may be moments in life when we seem to enjoy gratuitously the excitement of falling in love or reading a new poem or seeing afresh a familiar landscape, but they are bought at the price of an increased sensibility to misery and ugliness. Each of the higher values is bought at the price of a new sensitiveness, and therefore a new impulse to ameliorate the world we live in. We lose our freedom of action as a woman loses her freedom when she becomes a mother; and in so doing we gain a new zest in life.

If we hold strongly to a sense of specific and authoritative values, if we willingly accept the responsibilities they involve, then the question of the purpose of life disappears. The value of the individual life is not to be found in itself, but in ulterior ideals and in community. The graces of life are flowers on a tree that has to bear its seed, and the tree that is deliberately barren, and tries to find its own purpose within itself, will bear no flowers, or will flower only for a brief and scentless season.

What is true of the individual is also true of a nation : the

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sense of mission, which gives vitality and energy to a people, is not something that is spontaneously generated, nor can it be cultivated in isolation, as an end in itself. As the individual cannot find his full significance except in communal life and in devotion to impersonal ideals, so the State cannot flourish unless it is directed towards the service of the individual, and is based on the recognition of ideals that are beyond the province of the State itself. Social vitality is bound up with a tradition of devotion to specific virtues; it decays when that tradition breaks down into a passion for cheap amusement and amoral liberty of action. When people feel their individual rights more keenly than their obligations to each other, and when they feel no responsibility for good workmanship or for the arts and sciences, their community is already decadent or unhealthy.

For over a century now, the Western peoples have found material prosperity within their grasp. What was attainable became an aim, and because these people began with strong moral convictions, they had the energy to pursue that aim and came near to reaching it. Little by little their success turned their attention from the virtues on which their success rested; their moral intensity diminished, and with it their sense of community and their conviction of the value and purpose of life, so that they began to pose questions that do not need to be asked in a healthy society, and they made experiments in their own lives that led to the rediscovery of familiar truths, but brought unhappiness or boredom to those who made them.

In the end, we find that personal satisfaction, national greatness and human survival are not ends at which we can aim directly. Courage, prudence, generosity and truthfulness promote these ends, but only if we accept them as absolute values and look for no reward. To aim only at

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saving our own life, or that of the race, is to lose all that makes it valuable. And the virtues, no less than the graces of life, the aesthetic values, serve the purposes of life, yet have their justification in themselves. The sense of value cannot be bought cheaply: we cannot enjoy a sense of value without accepting responsibility, and we cannot continue to feel that there is a purpose in life unless we sacrifice some part of our apparent liberty. If we are to escape the disillusion and frustration that come from following our own unguided impulses, and if we are to solve the problems that arise from the conflict of values, we need to recognize our place in a tradition and to know our standing in a hierarchy of authority.

## *Chapter 9*

### AUTHORITY AND FREEDOM

#### *The Nature of Authority*

Today, any conscious respect for authority or tradition is overshadowed by our respect for liberty, free speech, and the spirit of free inquiry. We are still under the influence of an age of social upheaval, of bewildering invention, of colonial expansion, of successful and profitable innovation in every field; and it was natural that such an age should put a premium on innovation, rebellion and youth. No-one questions the positive achievements of the nineteenth century; but in the course of those achievements morality came to be regarded not as a source of inspiration and energy but as a mass of restrictions, tradition was seen only as out-worn prejudice and superstition, and authority was taken to mean obscurantism and obstruction. The word 'tradition' became associated with the idea of inert conservatism, and 'authority' with that of brutal force.

If military discipline were the only form of authority, and if respect for tradition necessarily implied dislike of every form of change and enterprise, then the antithesis between these notions and the ideals of personal liberty and independent thought would be thoroughly justified. But the

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authority of the soldier and the policeman is not the only kind of authority, and respect for tradition does not necessarily mean a repression of all innovation. Indeed, if we overcome the false associations of the words themselves, it is clear that invention can only be built on tradition, and that a proper understanding of the different kinds of authority is the only firm foundation for any opposition to the authority of force.

We can form a clearer idea of the nature of authority if we turn to the sciences. In matters of chemistry or physics, no-one is inclined to assert that one man's opinion is as good as another's. Within these fields we know our limitations, and we willingly make use of our capacity to recognize abler people than ourselves. Few of us have the intellectual or material equipment to verify the more advanced experiments and theories for ourselves; but we are able to go some little distance, and we accept the authority of those who are able to point out our errors; and they in turn can recognize abler men than themselves and interpret their decisions for us.

We apply something of the same procedure in our judgement of the authorities of the past. We repeat some of their experiments—those that later authorities have agreed to regard as important—and check some of the arguments; and for the rest we rely on the general consensus of opinion. This habit of trusting our neighbours in space and time is a necessary measure of economy: to repeat in every generation the mistakes of the past would be to abandon every possibility of improvement. Even in the sciences, there are limits to the range of profitable scepticism; and if chemists were to insist on doubting everything and everybody, their science would never advance beyond the point at which it was left by Geber or Paracelsus.

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The recognition of authority is thus an extension of our own experience and understanding; it is an act of discrimination, not an act of submission to irrelevant force. It is a choice in terms of enlightenment, not of ignorance; and we cannot make such a choice unless we ourselves have some knowledge and experience. In any study or activity, we need to spend one part of our time in making direct discoveries for ourselves and another in discovering what people are reliable. We are faced with a problem of proportion: we need 'the spirit of free inquiry'; we also need intellectual humility. A fixed determination not to take anything at all on trust would destroy the basis of confidence and collaboration on which all knowledge and civilization rest; and excessive reliance on other people's opinion would disqualify us even as judges of authority. The whole structure of any field of knowledge or wisdom is that of a freely chosen hierarchy in which each individual has a place according to his ability; it is not that of a dictatorship imposed from outside.

In many fields we willingly accept this kind of authority—we know our limitations as lawyers, doctors, footballers, and plumbers—but we are sometimes inclined to question it in fields of which we understand very little indeed. *There*, we feel, all men are equal, and one man's judgement is as good as another's. We are especially liable to indulge in this broadminded nihilism in matters of politics, morality, and aesthetics; and since we are inapt at distinguishing the specific authorities, we assume that there is no authority at all.

### *Authoritative Truth*

The argument that scientific truth is definite, impersonal and certain, whereas the other kinds are hopelessly vague,

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biased and unreliable, is not supported by a study of the sciences themselves. Between scientific and moral knowledge there is a difference of degree, but not of kind. Even in the sciences, knowledge is never absolutely certain, and we can never be quite sure that a new discovery will not compel us to alter our interpretation of familiar fact. In a double sense, the judgements and classifications that we accept in science are not absolute but only authoritative: far more than is commonly recognized they rest on the personal authority of the great scientists: and they are valid only for a limited range of purposes and to a finite degree of accuracy. But it would be ridiculous to allow this element of uncertainty to hinder us from recognizing that some observers are more reliable than others, and that some abstractions and some theories are relatively general and accurate whilst others are narrow and approximate. Absolute generality and precision, like absolute impersonal certainty, are unattainable, but we can have truth that is authoritative in both senses of the word; and this is all we need, and all we can expect. In the practical affairs of chemistry and engineering there comes a point at which we must take the best available theory and use it, even at the risk of our lives. In ethics and aesthetics there are times when the need to take the most authoritative truth and act on it is no less imperative.

It is certainly less easy to recognize authority in philosophy, morality or art than in engineering or astronomy; but the method is fundamentally the same. To demonstrate the durability of moral and aesthetic satisfactions and to discover their unforeseen results takes longer than it does to verify the facts and theories of physics, and it depends far more obviously on the development of a special sensibility; but it is not impossible. Taste and moral intuition are not

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wholly personal and incommunicable; in general, one person develops in much the same way as another; and it is a matter of common sense to make use of the experience of a moral or aesthetic critic who has travelled the same road as ourselves but with steps less faltering than our own. In some matters, it may take three or four generations to reveal the implications and the consequences of some taste or habit of mind; and the need for authoritative or traditional guidance becomes proportionally greater as it becomes harder to distinguish the true authority and the sound tradition. The temptation to trust the untutored impulse is strongest where the need for guidance is greatest; by giving way to it we do not establish a responsible and 'democratic' freedom of opinion, such as we find in the special sciences, but only an equalitarian anarchy of impulse, and we submit to forces that escape criticism only because they are unconscious.

Bad art and bad morals cannot be judged solely by their consequences; but their consequences are nevertheless bad by any reasonable standard, and if we had the nine lives of a cat we might ultimately discover something like an authoritative standard for ourselves, and believe in it all the more wholeheartedly because it was grounded in our own experience. 'Axioms in philosophy are not axioms till they are proved upon our senses'; and to rediscover for ourselves the value of traditional advice, to discover our own need for help and leadership, gives to our knowledge an intensity and particularity that could never be acquired at second-hand. A generation that has carried the distrust of all authority, moral, political, and intellectual, to the point of almost total scepticism may end by demonstrating in its own person truths that were familiar to its grandparents, and in so doing it may give a new vitality to the

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tradition and sharpen its own appreciation of authority. But there is nothing dignified or 'intellectually honest' in rediscovering in every age that universal scepticism, moral cynicism, and the direct pursuit of pleasure end in unhappiness and degradation. If we are to disregard those who, like St Augustine, tried all our experiments centuries ago, the art of reading might as well never have been invented. If we are to disregard every kind of knowledge because no knowledge is absolutely certain, and to argue that if neither of two propositions is certainly true, both are equally probable, we might as well abandon the pursuit of knowledge altogether.

### *The Dislike of Authority*

All civilization rests on the capacity to recognize true authority and to preserve a sound tradition; and for that reason civilization is at once precarious and secure. It is precarious because even the maintenance of tradition and authority, apart from any development or addition, calls for constant exercise of intelligence and sensibility. It is secure because the impulse to trust other people and to accept a public reality is at least as strong as the impulse to distrust one's neighbours and to indulge in private fantasy, and because a sound tradition or authority is an epitome of experience to which our own experience will compel us to return. And unless we have allowed ourselves to become very ignorant indeed we are likely to return to it before we pay the full penalty of our independence.

It is as hard for a society to recognize the value of its own authorities and the need for its own traditions as it is for the child to understand the wisdom of its parents and teachers; and yet this understanding is necessary, and it is not wholly unnatural. It was said, in the Spanish Civil War,

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that the untrained levies of the Republicans imitated the old soldiers of the International Brigade 'as a child imitates a grown man'; and the impulse to look for authority, and to follow the leadership of the man who acts as if he knows, is ingrained in our nature as deeply as the opposing impulse to rebel, to assert our independence, and to judge every question for ourselves. People have an almost pathetic yearning for leadership and guidance; the difficulty is not to persuade them to accept leadership, but to learn the limits of each authority, to distinguish true authority and false, and to preserve the uneasy balance between traditional wisdom and independent judgement.

The preponderance of the rebellious outlook among a large section of our society is in part the result of commercialism, and especially the commercialism of the newspapers, which use their influence to belittle every sort of specialized knowledge and every kind of authority except the authority of money. But the popular press merely reflects and exaggerates the existing opinion of the majority of its readers: the journalist does not really prefer charlatans to scientists, astrologers to theologians, and popular reviewers to literary critics. If he chooses to flatter the ordinary man by representing civil servants, statesmen, poets, and mathematicians as downright fools, it is mainly because this is what his readers want.

A far more serious influence has been the revolutionary outlook that helped to develop science and industry throughout the nineteenth century. A sceptical or even a hostile attitude to established authority, a willingness to try new experiments, and a fixed resolve to learn only from one's own experience and to learn quickly—all these were useful in a period of rapid change; they helped to make the changes; they brought profit and honour; and in the social

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upheaval that followed the Industrial Revolution they found as ready a field of application in politics as in industry. The spirit of free inquiry was emphasized as if it were *the principle* of thought and not merely one of the principles ; it was applied to religion, politics and poetry, and it became almost hopelessly entangled with the idea of social change, the extension of education, and the betterment of the condition of the poor. To this day, the teacher of science inculcates this principle with a moral fervour that he would never think of applying to the principle of mutual trust or to Ockham's Razor.

In all industrial countries there is an immense market for second-rate scientists and engineers, and these second-rate scientific minds form an active and competent public, well qualified to judge the authority of better men than themselves. This fact, quite as much as the facility with which scientific truths can be demonstrated, helps to maintain a healthy tradition and a lively discrimination among scientific authorities ; but it also tends to obscure the basis of discrimination itself. Because the criticism of scientific work is widespread, competent, and active, it is nearly always true to say that the latest text-book is the best and that recent research supersedes and includes yesterday's ; and in an important sense almost any teacher of dynamics is a better authority than Newton or D'Alembert. As Newton himself said : 'a pigmy standing on the shoulder of a giant can yet see further than the giant himself'. Outside the special sciences it is less easy to climb on the shoulders of the giant, and even the lapse of three and a half centuries does not enable us to improve upon the imaginative insight of Shakespeare or the spiritual insight of St John of the Cross ; but a person who has been brought up on a scientific curriculum is always tempted to use the test of modern-

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ity as a substitute for any real discrimination among authorities.

Partly through his belief that nothing at all is valuable or reliable unless it is up to date, partly because he has not learned the rudiments of moral and aesthetic criticism, the minor scientist has little understanding of authority outside the special sciences. He does not always recognize that the truths that can be tested only in the lives of individuals and of nations are no less important, and often no less reliable, than those that can be tested in the laboratory, even though they necessarily depend far more on the recognition of authority. Although in its own field his training inculcates a practical habit of mind, a passion for exact and impersonal observation, a knack of testing authorities by their results, and a justifiable contempt for purely verbal explanations, it offers little protection against quack religion, shallow philosophy, and purblind politics. The minor scientist whose general education has been neglected therefore becomes a disruptive force in national life, distrusting all traditional wisdom, and discontented because other people ignore his dangerously facile judgements.

As long as our civilization is mainly industrial, science is likely to occupy an important place in our education ; and the outlook of the minor scientist and technician is likely to dominate the society of the future. It is therefore important that he should learn to recognize the limitations of laboratory method, and understand that the sciences themselves depend quite as much on a discriminating use of authority as on empiricism and scepticism. Although the spirit of free inquiry is in contradiction to the principle of authority, all achievement rests on a judicious combination of the two, and each is useless unless it is supplemented by the other. The scientist cannot make discoveries unless he recognizes

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the authority of other workers and makes use of their results; and the humility and co-operation he exemplifies in his own work are no less necessary in the more difficult and more confusing fields of religion, politics and art.

### *Authority and Liberty*

The strongest objection to the notion of authority springs from the belief that authority and freedom are opposing notions, and that a man cannot follow authority and yet be free. To anyone brought up in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, the word 'authority' always carries a hint of bullying and compulsion, and a vague reminiscence of the anti-democratic doctrine that by reason of race, nationality or class, some are born to command and others to obey. Even if we avoid this association of ideas, there is still a real sense in which the use of authority contradicts the principles of individual liberty. If we make use of other people's judgement and experience, we are certainly limiting our apparent independence. But it is doubtful whether this apparent independence ever was or ever could be real, and whether it ever had anything to do with the kind of liberty we really value.

In England, the tradition of liberty is partly an expression of the Englishman's aloofness, his desire to be left alone, his intense distaste for mass hysteria. The English remember the Gordon Riots, and are ashamed; they look at plans for communal kitchens and co-ordinated flats, and feel uncomfortable. If a critic asks them what they want to be free from, the English do not know, or give diverse and contradictory answers; but their conception of liberty is not a mere extension of the rules of private enterprise, nor does it spring from a passion for anarchy and eccentricity.

It is not so much uniformity and discipline that the

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Englishman dislikes as intrusion into his private affairs. Whether he happens to be a duke or a bus-driver, he likes a little privacy in which he can let himself grow and build up his own small world of interest and affection, and this world he refuses to throw open to officials or business associates or casual fellow-travellers by train. The Englishman may smile when he reads of the Member of Parliament who in 1753 opposed a Census Bill on the grounds that it was 'subversive of the last remains of English liberty', but he understands the objection, and he feels that part of the strength of his nation is due to this reserve, this firm insistence that the individual exists in his own right and is not wholly the creature of the State.<sup>1</sup>

The cinema, the popular newspaper, and the conditions of modern industry, have done much to damage and distort this love of freedom. Whether in America or Britain, the cinema-going classes have forgotten how to amuse themselves; they cannot stand privacy and quiet; they have no use for liberty in the old sense. They still dislike the 'nosey parker', but the old wish to rely on their own efforts, the Victorian contempt for public charity, is not as strong as it was. The ideal of sturdy independence has become tinged with irresponsibility and selfishness, and with a kind of inverted totalitarianism, in which the State is regarded not as an object of supernatural veneration, but as an endless dispenser of free gifts. But although the belief in liberty often merges into a general dislike of all constraint, social, moral and intellectual, the older and more serious passion

<sup>1</sup> The last remains of English liberty were again threatened in 1822. When Sir Robert Peel was trying to get an adequate police force set up, a Parliamentary Committee reported: 'It is difficult to reconcile an effective system of police with that perfect freedom of action and exemption from interference which are the great privilege and blessing of society in this country.' (See D. Thomson, *The Democratic Ideal in France and England*.)

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for liberty remains ; the great majority of Englishmen and Americans still firmly believe in free speech and democratic government ; and between this ideal and the principle of authority there is no conflict at all.

The real conflict is between ignorance and knowledge, fantasy and fact. In the long run no political system can be stable if it does not go as far as possible towards giving the public what it wants ; but we do little good if we ignore the fact that the spontaneous desires of the ordinary man are often confused or harmful or contradictory. Just as the individual has to learn to recognize reality and understand it if in some measure he is to bend the world to his will, so a society has to learn what aims can be attained, and what the effect will be. The child emerges from the world of fantasy to face the obstructions and potentialities of the real world ; and in the same way a society has to learn by experience the difference between social reality and social fantasy.

We cannot be emancipated from facts, however ardently and ignorantly we try. Only when we recognize that we cannot be in two places at once, do we start on the long road leading towards inventions that will enable us to be in one place and speak in another. In the early days of every science, people have always tried to use direct and naïve methods to bring about results that were ultimately reached by long detours and slow, laborious advances. To-day no-one would suggest a return to the early search for perpetual motion, the philosopher's stone, and the *elixir vitae*, but we still try to make work easier, to turn common materials into those that are rare and valuable, and to prolong human life ; and we have learned not to question the good faith of experts who warn us against attractive routes that have always led to failure. In these matters, we accept

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the authority of the specialists not only on questions of method but also on the direction of our aim and the necessary intensity of our effort. We learn that some of the things we want to do are impossible or would cost more than we are prepared to give, or would not bring the results that we expect; and instead of repeating in our own lives the disappointments and disasters of past generations, we submit our desires and tastes to the wisdom and experience of other people.

Something of the same respect for authority is needed in politics if we are not to waste our time pursuing the impossible. There are certainly some 'experts' who use their skill mainly to defend the interests of their profession or their class; but we cannot afford to distrust every expert because some are rogues and others are narrow-minded. To question what Francis Bacon called 'frail and uncertain authority' is always necessary; but to belittle every kind of authority, and to maintain that the expert is *always* wrong, is to attack the whole foundation of civilized democracy. A democracy cannot flourish unless people are willing and able to recognize each kind of true authority; and conversely, true authority can flourish only in a State in which the citizens are free from coercion. Properly understood, the notion of civil liberty is inseparable from the recognition of specific authorities. The business of the democratic citizen is not merely to vote for representatives who pledge themselves to support his interests, but to make use of men whose knowledge, character and judgement are better than his own; and the political structure of an enlightened democratic state is typical of every authoritative hierarchy.

### *The Misuse of Authority*

True authority always rests on specific abilities; the

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authority of the good mathematician is mathematical, the authority of the efficient soldier is military, and each authority can be enforced only by its own appropriate method. To call in an alien authority—as when the diplomat calls in the soldier, the churchman calls in the policeman, or the philosopher calls in the advertising expert or the social snob—is to admit that events have passed beyond the control of our own specific methods, and to undermine the foundation of our own proper authority. The farther we move from our original authority, the more damaging is our confession of failure. The poet and the scholar claim that the ultimate power of persuasion is found in their own specific use of words: if they resort to sarcasm, scurrility or facetiousness they are tacitly admitting their failure; if they call in the help of the law, they are admitting the limitation of all discussion, whether reasoned or emotional; if they horse-whip their opponent they are abandoning the claims of law as well as those of literature and losing the distinction between their own authority and that of the prize-fighter and the assassin.

Often the use of false authority is unconscious, and the fault is partly that of the audience, and partly that of the authorities themselves. There is always a temptation for the elderly and successful to confuse seniority and social distinction with their own true authority; and conversely, the young and unsuccessful are tempted to a kind of inverted snobbery in which wealth, success and age are regarded as infallible marks of incompetence. Again, a society in which most people regard money as the only measure of value is necessarily fuddled about authority. The authority that a man earns as a manufacturer of ice-cream or motor-cars is convertible at will into authority in the fields of statesmanship and learning. He can endow professorships and labora-

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tories, and so encourage one kind of study at the expense of others ; he can turn the mind of a nation away from poetry into chemistry, or out of chemistry into religion. He cannot always dictate the answers, but he can dictate the questions that engage a nation's attention ; and in a pluto-democracy he is more likely to be applauded for his generosity than rebuked for his presumption.

As incomes become more equal, this kind of confusion is likely to diminish ; but there is no reason to suppose that democratic decisions will be wiser than those of Andrew Carnegie and Lord Nuffield. Indeed, they are likely to be far less disinterested and long-sighted, and to show far less respect for true authority. Unless people are taught when to rely on the judgement of others better qualified than themselves, and how to recognize such authorities, they cannot be expected to judge a poet by anything but his eccentricities or a mathematician by anything but the length of his beard, the number of his degrees, and the extent of his absentmindedness. And to this confusion we must expect a sophisticated and cynical reaction, which adds to the confusion by recognizing no authority at all.

In any ordered hierarchy the higher authorities have a responsibility to the lower, just as the lower themselves have the responsibility for discrimination. The business of the mathematician is not merely to produce good mathematics but also to see that the 'lower orders' are not deceived by charlatans and do not confuse mathematics with theosophy or mistake astrology for astronomy. It is ridiculous and terrifying that in an age rich in scholarly and intellectual talent, and equally rich in every kind of superstition and bad taste, so few critics can be found who will take up the attitude of T. E. Hulme, and 'consider it a duty, and a very pleasant duty, and one very much neg-

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lected in this country, to expose charlatans when one sees them'.

The reluctance of the intellectual to accept the responsibilities of leadership comes partly from a false modesty (which is itself a kind of vanity) and partly from an outmoded habit of appealing only to the gentleman. This attitude, which was appropriate enough when the gentleman was the only person who could read and the only person whose opinion mattered, is suicidal in an age in which the great mass of the people have the power not only to lead their country into war and economic disaster but also to stifle the arts and prostitute the sciences. The disappearance of the old, autonomous culture, founded on the Bible and on oral tradition, and its replacement by the new and semi-literate 'culture' of commercial newspapers, make it all the more important to realize that in a strictly egalitarian society the arts, the sciences and literature could not exist as the amusement of a superior minority: the pressure of mass-production, mass-amusement, and mass-stupidity would force them out of existence.

By lowering the average level of the reading public and coarsening the English language, compulsory education has certainly added to the difficulties of the serious writer; but the situation will not be remedied by shutting one's eyes and assuming that the old reading public is still there, and is still the governing class. Nor will it be remedied by writing for an imaginary utopian posterity. Democracy cannot survive unless people are taught where to look for accurate information and how to distinguish true authority from mere pretentiousness or bullying; and they are not likely to learn unless the authorities themselves bestir themselves and accept obligations, not only towards their colleagues and equals, but towards the whole people.

## AUTHORITY AND FREEDOM

### *Co-ordination and the Transition to Action*

If one kind of authority never impinged on another, it would be fairly easy to see our obligations and to recognize our place in every ordered hierarchy. But in practice we have to face the conflict of different kinds of authority as well as the discrepancies and divergencies of experts of the same kind, and we have to deal with the uncomfortable transition from thought to action. The claims of the diplomat and the soldier, and those of the moralist and the artist, often conflict; and even when it is quite clear who is the authority, it is not always clear that he should be given executive power. Distrust of the expert and the 'highbrow' is not wholly based on ignorance and jealousy, nor on the simple-minded belief that where experts disagree the ignorant can decide. It rests partly on recognition of the need for co-ordination, and partly on perception of the structure of democracy.

The expert is often inclined to over-value his own activity and to ignore factors with which he is not professionally concerned; and there are certainly moments when the decision of the ordinary man is wiser than that of the expert. But the need at this point is not to ridicule the idea of specialized authority, but to recall the specialists to a sense of proportion. And even in this matter of co-ordination, there are authorities if we care to look for them. The philosopher and the theologian are not solely concerned with comparing and co-ordinating the *concepts* used in the special sciences; they are concerned also with comparing and co-ordinating the *value* of different activities. To these problems of co-ordination, as to the problems of the scientist, there is no final answer; but we can at least remove some of their asperities, and part of the education of the specialist

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could profitably be devoted to a study of the limits, and the social and moral implications, of his own chosen activity.

The problem of the transition from thought to action is scarcely less difficult. At first sight we are tempted to say that a man should be given executive power according to his character, talents and accomplishments. This is the solution of those who believe in government by a committee of technical experts ; but this solution ignores not only the difficulty of choosing the experts and reconciling their divergencies, but also the effect on the ordinary man. The democratic method is to make a sharp distinction between intellectual and executive authority : the expert may decide a question, but his decision has no effect unless he can persuade the majority. The merit of this system is that it throws the maximum responsibility on the ordinary citizen ; its weakness is that it is slow and cumbersome, and disheartening to the experts themselves.

The most radical solution is to roll all the authorities into one, and to follow a leader whose decisions in science, politics, art, and morality, will be binding for a whole nation. The problems of conflicting authority then fight themselves out in one personality, and the ordinary man is absolved from the responsibility of recognizing any authority save that of force—and there is very little difficulty in recognizing the authority of a policeman with a sub-machine-gun. The system is one that appeals to all who are intellectually lazy and to all who find the responsibilities of democratic citizenship a strain. It is not wholly disastrous, for unless the dictator is a fool (and if he is a fool he is not likely to remain in power), he will try to recognize and use the true authorities in the subjects that happen to interest him, and by giving them official standing he will create a general ap-

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pearance of enlightenment and culture greater than is possible in a democratic state.

But in spite of its apparent efficiency, the system is degrading to the ordinary citizen. By publicly contradicting the principle of specific authority, it flies in the face of fact, and it must end by corrupting the specific authorities themselves. As a temporary expedient, it is necessary in times of national stress ; and the less activity people show in recognizing true authority, the more necessary it becomes. In the kind of society which some newspapers and some film magnates are trying to produce—a society of sub-human mass-men, with no sense of social responsibility and no capacity to recognize any authority save that of force—dictatorship becomes inevitable ; and when the ‘progressive’ liberal and the ‘emancipated’ scientist insist on the importance of liberty without emphasizing the importance of modest and responsible judgement, they unwittingly apply their efforts in the same direction.

### *The Limits of Toleration*

In nothing short of a perfect society of universal geniuses could the principle of specific authority operate in complete freedom. The vain, the ignorant and the stupid will always fail to recognize some kind of true authority ; and if their vanity, ignorance and stupidity threaten to bring disaster not only on themselves but also on other people, then we must choose between disaster and coercion. Complete toleration is always impossible, and it is arguable that the liberal democracies, although they have been highly intolerant of some forms of commercial dishonesty, ‘have been excessively and dangerously tolerant of doctrines that threaten their own existence. Their cult of free speech, together with their strictly secular education, which fights shy

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of anything that can be called controversial, leaves people to settle the controversial questions in ignorance of all authority; and the irresponsible aloofness of intellectual authorities has been carried to a point at which the liberty to think for oneself becomes an invitation to private jerry-building, to pseudo-science, quack religion, and clap-trap politics, and threatens to dissolve the whole social and intellectual fabric.

It would be comforting to think that a return to reason would be possible without coercion, but it would not be true. Even the intellectual authorities cannot be expected to bestir themselves and serve their proper function in a democracy without some external pressure; and journalists who have been brought up to believe that it pays to attack and ridicule any form of intellectual authority cannot be expected to reform themselves overnight. The social consequences of widespread superstition, sentimentality, and political selfishness, are as fatal as those of bad plumbing and bad logic; their action is slower, but no less certain. A taste for bad music, a foolishly cynical or disillusioned attitude to life, a passion for revolution for revolution's sake—all these are, in the long run, matters of public as well as private concern; and to avoid them, some measure of coercion is necessary.

Coercion, however, need not be repressive: it is as easy to reward virtue as it is to punish vice. The honours that we sometimes give to first-rate scientists and second-rate writers, the subsidies given to the arts and sciences, the invitations given to eminent citizens to serve on public committees and Royal Commissions, in all these there is an element of compulsion, a use of one kind of authority—money, public honour, executive power—to reinforce the 'higher' and weaker authorities. If the whole of this pro-

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cess were conceived as a work of public education, if we spent half as much on rewarding journalists and professional men for exposing ignorance and silliness as we spend on rewarding police and judges for exposing dishonesty, there would be little need to muzzle the crank, the monomaniac and the misguided revolutionary.

Even this very mild measure of coercion is unpleasant and subject to abuse, and could be used to bolster up any régime, however false and unjust the principles on which it rested. The moment we admit a limit to toleration, even in the interest of 'authority', we begin to undermine the notion of specific authority. We cannot, and do not, wholly escape this evil; but if we leave the malady of our society to cure itself, a time will come when far more drastic measures will be needed. The limits of toleration are imposed, not by the whims of a governing class, but by the dictation of circumstances. To maintain the political forms of democracy among a society of irresponsible mass-men, each intent on the pursuit of trivial interests and pleasures, and all incapable of recognizing quality in thought and judgement, is to head direct for economic and military failure; and the failure will provoke a reaction away from the freely chosen hierarchy which is the only durable form of democracy, towards the more primitive and more easily recognized forms of authority. If we want to maintain or extend the field of toleration and diminish the use of false authorities we must devote our energy to strengthening the recognition of the true.

## *Chapter 10*

### RESPONSIBILITY AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN

#### *The Need for Responsibility*

If we feel intensely that something is not merely pleasurable, but has a real, authoritative value, we no longer accept events as they happen, but try to dominate them in order to preserve the thing that is valuable, and to preserve the appreciation of it both in ourselves and in others. A sense of value implies responsibility as surely as love involves anxiety; and this responsibility is an intrinsic part of the significance of life. If we try to keep the enjoyment without accepting the burden, we find that the sense of value, like love itself, fades into a memory of past excitements, a mere habit of thinking that we care for so-and-so, without vitality and zest. We lose the capacity to suffer, and at the same time we lose the capacity to enjoy. If we set out to enjoy ourselves, quietly and decently, serving no-one but ourselves, and refusing the responsibilities of a parent and citizen, we find in the end that our life is unsatisfactory and insipid. We can postpone the feeling of disillusion and aimlessness by setting ourselves trivial aims—reducing our golf handicap, owning a bigger car, climbing a more difficult

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mountain—but such aims as these, which are worth no great sacrifice, will fail in an emergency. The only aims that are permanently satisfactory are those that override our personal pleasure and impose a permanent responsibility. The further we are removed from the pressure of immediate necessity, the greater our need for such a burden. A talent and an opportunity imply an obligation, and a talent lodged with us idle becomes a source of irritation and unhappiness.

Apart from this personal need for responsibility, there is the far more obvious social need. In public affairs, the only alternative to paternalism, whether socialist or fascist, is the individual exercise of responsibility; and for the sake of the State as well as for the sake of the individual, it is important that responsibility should not be confined to a 'governing class, nor to a paid bureaucracy, however efficient. Policies that demand an increasing concentration of responsibility in the hands of a few ministers and civil servants may be forced upon us by the increasing centralization of industry; but this concentration is a movement not in the direction of a free and responsible democracy, but in the direction of a termite State. When 'progressive' politicians talk of centralization and state-control as if these were good in themselves, they are, however unintentionally, seconding the cinemas and the million-sale newspapers in their efforts to produce a new class of mental inferiors, ill-equipped for the responsibilities of a democratic citizen, and almost wholly unconscious of the existence of such responsibilities.

The forces that are tending to reduce the ordinary citizen to a mere economic and industrial unit with standardized tastes, habits, and opinions, are directed not only against the Christian tradition, with its insistence on the value of the individual soul, but also against the 'progressive' tradi-

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tion with its belief in the individual right to self-fulfilment. Among the more lively, the process gives rise to inarticulate resentment. They are bored with their standard work and their standard pleasure ; and they welcome any distraction, even war, if it enables them to get out of the rut. The root of their trouble is their lack of responsibility ; but although they know that their lives are trivial, they do not know why. They are starved of responsibility, and yet it does not occur to them that they might regain their vitality and self-respect by taking an active part in social work, or in the criticism of the arts, or even in a more rigorous discipline of their private lives.

In part, the difficulty is the result of the changing needs and possibilities of industry. Social change and industrial mobility are essential to a period of rapid development, and in the past hundred and fifty years thousands of men and women have been uprooted from their villages and small towns and transplanted to cities where neither they nor their children have developed any sense of communal responsibility. Today the squire, with his very visible duties and rewards, is no longer a dominant figure, nor is the captain of industry ; they have been replaced by the shareholder, who has no tradition to make him feel that he is responsible for the well-being of his workpeople, his tenants, or his customers. Often it is not even possible for him to exert an influence directly : he is a permanent absentee landlord, who does not even know where his estates are, or how they are managed. The whole basis of social responsibility has changed : what was once a matter of personal relationship becomes the day-to-day business of a government office and a trade union ; in place of the local group as a social and moral unit, we have the State ; in place of personal contact we have political activity ; and often this

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political activity is treated not as a matter of taking a share in the common responsibility, but as a defence of personal interests.

The result is both humiliating and depressing. The worker sees himself as a cog in a machine, and is either cynical or resentful. The rentier cannot wholly disguise from himself the fact that he is not a real member of the community, but a parasite extracting all he can from the public; and in spite of all the satisfactions that money can buy he is vaguely aware of the pointlessness of his own existence. A wealthy class can justify its existence only by its devotion to activities that are valuable but for which other people have little time or opportunity. A Cavendish or a Robert Boyle may justify a hundred idle loafers, not only in the eyes of the world, but also in their own. It is arguable that we no longer need a wealthy class to provide us with poets, philosophers, scientists, and patrons of the arts and sciences (though up to the present, the only 'disinterested' activities widely encouraged by the poorer classes have been football, baseball, and professional cinema-acting). But if our society is not to stagnate, we need *someone* to assume the responsibilities no longer accepted by the upper class; and if we are not to lose our own zest for life we need to accept our share and a little more.

### *The Burden of Responsibility*

The assumption of responsibility, like the recognition of the reality of things and people, is a normal stage in human development, and both steps are difficult. In both we have to reject an appearance of liberty and to accept restrictions which narrow down an infinite field of possibility to a real world and a practical career. To the immature mind, the existence of responsibility is a nuisance; but like the hard

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reality of things and people, it is a nuisance that must be accepted, and if we try to ignore it we find ourselves frustrated and unhappy.

But the recognition of responsibility comes later in life than the recognition of material reality, and it can be more easily postponed. People are not all equal in their perception of reality, and they are still less equal in their sense of responsibility. Just as the child exercises ingenuity in postponing or blurring its recognition of reality, so the adolescent and the adult find ingenious ways of postponing the day when they will find themselves committed to a definite course with definite obligations. They carry on a life-long battle with reality, and sometimes they are partially successful.

Whether in children or in adults, the sense of responsibility needs to be coaxed and cultivated ; and if we expect too much of it we often provoke a rebellion into complete irresponsibility. We cannot teach a child to be responsible by expecting it to evolve all the higher human ideals out of its own inner consciousness ; and we cannot build a responsible democracy on the assumption that every citizen is fully alive to his own responsibilities already. We need to offer people the heaviest burden they can carry, a burden a little heavier than they are willing to carry ; but we do no service to democratic ideals if we ignore the fact that many people not only prefer orders to a free choice but also assume that the responsibility for action and decision never rests with *them*, but always with the government, the civil service, or the Church.

The doctrine that the common citizen should carry the largest possible share of responsibility for government is soundly based both in morality and in political expediency ; and there is no doubt that most people want the advantages

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that come from democratic government. But how many people are willing to accept the anxiety that goes with knowledge and power? How many are capable? The success of reiterated falsehood and absurdity is not entirely due to the malice of those who exploit credulity and ignorance for their own ends; it is made possible by the masses themselves, who will not take the trouble to recognize true authority, and by those who, in spite of their superior talents, refuse to recognize their duty to protect others less fortunate or less talented.

In our own age, although we have tried to achieve democracy, we have done little to cultivate the sense of responsibility or to make clear the civil obligations on which democracy must rest. In escaping from feudalism and plutocracy we have learned to set a high value on freedom; and in emphasizing freedom we have been inclined to look upon responsibilities as hindrances to liberty. We reserve the liberty to criticize, but we do not accept the obligation to criticize with knowledge and understanding. We form associations to maintain the freedom of the press, but none to insist on the responsibility on which that freedom must ultimately rest. Movements that begin as genuine movements of emancipation are allowed to degenerate into mere evasion of responsibility. The cult of youth, for example, which is excellent in so far as it is a defence of energy, activity and natural idealism, often becomes a cult of irresponsibility. The passion for 'travelling light', for avoiding burdens and commitments, is a natural outcome of industrial evolution and its rapid transfers of labour; but it is not an adult or a civilizing passion, nor can it be the foundation of a secure democracy.

## THE EVASION OF RESPONSIBILITY

### *The Evasion of Responsibility*

When we cast up the balance-sheet of democracy, against the decreasing upper-class interest in religion, science, literature, art, and serious politics, must be set the awakening of the other classes. If hopes were horses, we could safely say that we were already on the way to a society in which the line between governing class and governed would be less hard and fast than at present. But there is still a gap between the two publics: the one, shrinking in power and numbers, slowly abandoning the standards of disinterested public service that are natural and necessary to a confident governing class, is still the formal heir of an active and cultivated tradition. The other, uncritical and ill-informed, is still incapable of making enduring judgements; its most able members, who have spent years of their life in struggling against handicaps that would have been removed with a little money, are often rebellious, resentful and irresponsible.

At its best, the education of the old governing class was an education in responsibility; it was moral as well as intellectual, and even though the formal scheme placed little emphasis on the arts and sciences there was still a strong tradition that discrimination and taste were appropriate and dignified accomplishments for a gentleman. The new education which was open to the lower and middle classes was very different. It was intended to provide useful recruits for industry and to enable its products to 'get on'. It was based on the inculcation of knowledge, and placed little emphasis on social and intellectual responsibility. The teachers have done their best, but it is only forty years since secondary education was firmly established in England, and in general the products of the English elemen-

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tary and secondary schools do not yet think of themselves as responsible for national affairs, or for discrimination in literature and science. They have grown up under the shadow of an age in which 'the governing class' decided these matters, and they still believe that somewhere there is someone else who exercises judgement, taste and social responsibility. This reliance on a vague 'They', who are supposed to determine policy, to safeguard public health, to protect the interests of science, to choose good books and to support good causes, would be all very well in a feudal or plutocratic society; but if we are trying to establish social equality, responsibility cannot be left to people who do not exist, or to 'authorities' who receive neither recognition nor active and informed co-operation.

The passage from oligarchy to complete democracy is made none the easier by the unconscious conservatism of many 'progressive' reformers. They are so used to the idea of the people's champions wringing concessions from a reluctant ruling class that they cannot think in any other terms. Like the old Bolsheviks who were such a nuisance to the Communist Government of Russia, they have hardened into permanent and irresponsible opposition. They feel that it is not their business to ascertain the facts or to consider a question in all its bearings; and they believe that any attack on established order, however ignorant or ill-considered, is a battle fought for freedom: the mere act of faith involved in believing themselves to be on the side of progress exempts them from the duty of being practical.

This evasion of responsibility is the bane of democratic politics. People say that they are only one of forty million or of two thousand million, and that they have no power to act and therefore no duty; or they persuade themselves that by joining a political party or signing a manifesto they end the

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whole matter and are no longer under any obligation to exercise either private generosity or honest and unbiased judgement. The most notorious offenders are the journalists who earn their living by degrading public taste and judgement, and then try to salve their consciences by holding violent political opinions flatly opposed to those they express in their newspaper. When challenged, they blame 'the system' or assert that 'a man must live'. They condemn bankers and newspaper owners for being influenced by considerations of profit, yet act from the same motives themselves; and like the Devil himself, they are willing to become honest and responsible citizens if honesty and responsibility can be made to pay.

A more curious, and perhaps more sympathetic, form of evasion is one that might be called Perfectionism. One commonly hears the argument that if our society were more just and equal, if there were less opposition to every generous movement of reform, if our housing and our social services were better, if our people cared more for art and logic and literature, then the country would be worth working for and fighting for. As it is, the Perfectionist is very conscious of his own talents and virtues; he believes—quite rightly—that judged by his own standards most of his fellow-citizens are mean, bigoted, stupid, and insensitive; and from this he goes on to argue that he has no obligations towards them.

Such an attitude is not dishonest, but it will not stand a reasoned scrutiny. It is the nature of all ideals of beauty, truth, and goodness, that they should not be fully realized; and as long as people are diverse in their talents some people will be above the average in social sense, in intellect or in musical sensibility. But a talent is a source of misery unless it is regarded as an obligation, and the possession of

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such a talent is no reason for condemning other people or for making the situation worse by refusing to help. Any improvement that has been made in the past has been made by the people who were willing to work within the limits of human imperfection ; and the practical choice is between one imperfect society and another, or between an imperfect society and social chaos. In a perfect world, there would be no scope for moral effort ; and in a world of equal talents the Perfectionist, being no longer in any way above the average, would have no special insight or understanding to contribute.

### *Rights and Obligations*

Many of these evasions, it will be seen, do not spring from deliberate irresponsibility, but from certain misconceptions about the nature of politics and the nature of democracy. In the nineteenth century, it was natural to look upon all social advance as a fight against reactionary interests. The real source of progress was the work of the explorers, settlers, inventors, and skilled mechanics ; but the working class had to wring their share of the increment from the rich who received it in the first place, and it was not surprising that they came to think of the struggle for a higher standard of living as a struggle against the selfishness of the well-to-do. Today, the more popular type of liberal reformer still regards the transition to democracy as a battle in which the privileged few struggle to retain their advantages while the masses clamour for their rights, and slowly gain them. In the resulting quarrel for material advantages, both sides begin to lose sight of responsibility altogether, so that we hear a great deal about 'Human Rights' and nothing at all about the 'Whole Duty of Man'. To emphasize rights rather than duties may be tactful as a

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matter of political rhetoric, but we cannot all enjoy a right unless we do our share to satisfy the corresponding claims of other people. Every social right implies a corresponding obligation, and movements in themselves both practicable and just are stultified from the beginning if the promoters do not understand the price that must be paid and do not urge their followers to pay it.

Mr. Wells, for example, has sponsored ten 'Rights of Man' which, at first sight, commend themselves to anyone who does not feel that his own comforts and privileges would lose all their savour if they were shared by other people. Let us consider, however, the first three of these 'Rights':

- '(1) That every man is joint heir to all the resources, powers, inventions and possibilities accumulated by our forerunners, and entitled without distinction of race, colour or professed belief or opinions, to the nourishment, covering, medical care and attention needed to realize his full possibilities of physical and mental development and to keep him in a state of health from his birth to his death.
- '(2) That he is entitled to sufficient education to make him a useful and interested citizen, and further that special education should be so made available as to give him equality of opportunity for the development of his distinctive gifts in the service of mankind, that he should have easy access to information upon all matters of common knowledge throughout his life and enjoy the utmost freedom of discussion, association and worship.
- '(3) That he may engage freely in any lawful occupation, earning such pay as the need for his work and the in-

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rement it makes to the common welfare may justify. That he is entitled to paid employment and to a free choice whenever there is a variety of employment open to him. He may suggest employment for himself and have his claim publicly considered, accepted or dismissed.<sup>1</sup>

Any declaration of this kind presupposes some view of human nature and human resources, and the presuppositions, as well as the practical difficulties involved in the application of the 'rights', at once appear if we begin to state the corresponding obligations :

- (1) It is the duty of every man, without distinction of race, colour or professed belief or opinions, to accumulate resources, powers, inventions and possibilities for his successors to the best of his ability, and to provide for his contemporaries such nourishment, covering, medical care and attention as may enable them to realize their full possibilities of physical and mental development and keep them in a state of health from their birth to their death.
- (2) Every man must place his goods and talents at the service of his fellow creatures in sufficient measure to make them useful and interested citizens and give them equality of opportunity to develop their distinctive gifts for the service of mankind. Furthermore, he must allow his fellow-men to express any opinions and indulge in any form of association and worship they may choose, no matter how false or dangerous he may believe these opinions to be.
- (3) He must accept cheerfully and loyally any shortage of goods and services that may result from other men's

<sup>1</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Rights of Man*, pp. 80-1. See also *The New World Order*, pp. 139-40.

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decision not to work at all, or not to offer the goods and services that he could wish. Furthermore, if the appointed authority decides that his own proposed work is unnecessary and does not increase the common wealth, he must unhesitatingly accept their decision. If he is engaged in the making of luxuries he must expect his wages to be less than the market value of the goods he provides by an amount that depends on the payment made by the State to the workers who provide the public services.

This is already a tall order, and by the time that we have finished examining the Ten Rights we find that they imply most of the Ten Commandments as well as sundry exhortations from the Prophets and the New Testament. How are these moral precepts to be given the force of law? The Christian Church has not wholly succeeded after twenty centuries of effort, and Mr. Wells evades the difficulty by ignoring its existence. He assumes, for example, that the First Obligation is unnecessary, and that a year or two of forced labour, together with the desire for pocket money, and the boredom that comes from impoverished idleness, would provide all the work that is needed. 'It is entirely practicable so to order things that a man may, if he sees fit, go through life without doing a stroke of work, living in a comfortable domicile, walking if he likes from place to place, finding rest homes and free meals wherever he goes, wearing decent clothes.'<sup>1</sup>

How soon people would start to work if they and their possible children were provided with free food, clothing, housing, medical attention, and education, is doubtful. Given a free choice, millions of farm labourers, miners and

<sup>1</sup> *The Rights of Man*, p. 66.

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sailors might well decide that cheap, non-productive amusements, such as pigeon-breeding, chess, greyhound racing, and reading in the public libraries provided under the Second Right, are no more boring than hoeing turnips, heaving coal, or scrubbing decks.<sup>1</sup> It usually takes members of the wealthy class two or three generations to discover that life is dull without work and responsibility, and even then the family wisdom is sometimes lost rather sooner than the family money.

It is not 'reactionary' to argue in this way; we are not arguing with Arthur Young that 'everyone but an idiot knows that the lower classes must be kept poor, or they will never be industrious'. We are merely pointing out that any social advance must rest on a corresponding moral advance, and that if we weaken the sense of responsibility we undermine the basis of social progress. If we can maintain and intensify the moral conviction that makes hard work and honest workmanship a virtue—that is to say, if we accept the First Obligation—it will ultimately be possible for the prosperous countries to offer unconditional maintenance to all their citizens. If we neglect the moral aim, and concentrate on the material right it will be necessary either to introduce a long term of compulsory labour—Mr. Wells's estimate of 'a few years' is wildly optimistic<sup>2</sup>—or else to carry the modern advertiser's campaign of snobbery and social pressure in favour of luxuries to such a point that men would work an uneconomic length of time for a bicycle or a gramophone or a set of chromium-plated fish-knives. Both methods are possible, but the physical 'compulsion' of the first sounds even more unpleasant than

<sup>1</sup> Characteristically Mr. Wells offers free information 'upon all matters of common knowledge' and says nothing about art and music.

<sup>2</sup> More cautious economists (including the Soviet planners) are inclined to look on twenty to twenty-five years as a minimum.

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the indirect compulsion of a capitalist economy, and the second would intensify those features of society that are as hateful to Mr. Wells as they are to other people.

In somewhat the same way, each of the other 'Rights' brings us back to a familiar problem of morality and philosophy. Except in so far as they are incompatible with one another, there is nothing wrong with the 'Rights' as aims. But the emphasis on rights, not duties, is apt to defeat its own ends : it draws the individual's attention away from the value and necessity of his own efforts to the benefit he may expect from the world ; it cultivates the sense of grievance rather than the sense of obligation ; and its effect is to pull society apart rather than bring it together. By turning a co-operative commonwealth into a creditor's meeting, it deprives the citizen of any feeling that his own life is responsible and significant.

In countries where a 'progressive' régime has failed, the failure has been due to this reversal of the moral order. And this is true whether the failure is noisy and visible, as in Spain or Mexico, or whether it is the silent, invisible failure of a well-ordered Social Democracy, in which the citizens are well-fed, contented, yet lacking—as in Denmark—any determination to maintain their independence or even—as in Sweden—their racial existence. Where the great majority of the people do not understand the need for responsibility, society must either decay or fall under the influence of a small and active minority which imposes on the others, not a general sense of responsibility (it cannot do that), but a set of narrow obligations directed to some definite end. The downfall of the *ancien régime* in France was due to its insistence on rights and its neglect of duties, and the same may well be true of another class to-day.

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### *Responsibility is Personal*

In the face of obvious public evils, it is always easy, and for the moment it may be satisfying, to denounce 'the system' or 'the State'. But compared with the individuals of which it is composed, the State has only a thin and ghostly reality. Its social and economic structure may embody traditional wisdom, or it may rest on needs and aims that are out-moded and forgotten; it may visit the sins and virtues of the fathers on the children; but the State itself, like a limited liability company, has neither body to be kicked nor soul to be damned. In the main it is the outcome of conscious human thoughts and motives, and its morality arises from the morality and intelligence of its citizens. The conduct of a democratic State may be a little more generous and far-sighted than that which is advocated by the majority of its citizens, because people sometimes put their affairs into the hands of agents more enlightened than themselves; but the freedom of choice of a corporation, as such, is far narrower than that of its members: its executive is appointed with certain definite, restricted aims in view, and cannot be far deflected from those aims even in the interests of charity and mercy.

To hold the State responsible for the morality of its citizens, or to expect it to behave with a morality higher than the highest common factor of their personal virtue, is therefore misguided. The primary field of morality is the life of the individual: the 'duties' of the State are only the duties of the individual at second-hand. To set all one's hopes on some far-reaching legislative scheme is to invite disillusion and disappointment, and it may even result in neglecting the basis of personal morality on which any such scheme must rest. The man who indignantly de-

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nounces the conduct of his own and other countries and expends extravagant emotion on some hypothetical Utopia does not always scrutinize his own moral activities with the attention they deserve. He asks for Christian conduct among nations, but not among individuals; he treats the political or the economic structure of society as a real moral entity, and excuses the failures of the individual on the ground that he is the victim of an unjust social system. He ends by regarding the citizen not as a responsible moral agent at all, but as the holder of absolute inalienable rights.

To stake out claims against society, and to talk of 'natural rights', can be dangerously misleading if we do not recognize their nature and their dual origin. Our rights, no less than our responsibilities, spring from our relation to God and our relation to society. Or in the language of the agnostic, there is the moral responsibility to aim at the highest, and the contractual responsibility that is simply a necessity of the kind of society we want to live in; and there are the corresponding rights. If, for example, we claim the right to live in a democracy, we necessarily sacrifice some part of our leisure and our freedom. Indeed, if we choose to live in any community at all we commit ourselves to responsibilities and duties. We can work for specific changes within that community; but if we let our campaign develop into an anti-social attitude, or if we attempt to contract out whenever we find our responsibilities irksome, we destroy the basis of society itself. Once a corporate decision is taken, we do wrong to oppose it. Sometimes the wrong may be the lesser of two evils, for although our duties to God and our duties to society often converge, they do not always coincide; but it is none the less an evil in itself.

It is certainly our duty to criticize our own society in the light of standards that derive from something more than

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social convenience itself; but criticism should begin where it is most effective, and it is most effective in ourselves. We can do little to modify the influence of capitalism unless we have scruples about our own investments and insurance; we cannot give effect to our disapproval of the sensationalism of the popular press unless we check the weaknesses in ourselves that give it countenance. To make politics a substitute for personal morality, and to treat the social system or the State as a moral entity with a conscience and a code of honour, is to hinder rather than help the progress of political reform. A bad system can certainly make it difficult for the citizen to behave well, and a good system can do something to minimize the effects of greed and selfishness; but to base legislation on moral prejudice that is not already deeply rooted in the convictions and conduct of an overwhelming majority of citizens is neither moral nor expedient. As the American experiment in Prohibition showed, it merely serves to bring the whole body of law into contempt. The only alternative to reform through the individual is reform through the action of a minority using force or bribery or misrepresentation to gain their ends; and few reforms could be said to justify such means, and fewer still could be permanently established by such methods.

### *The Limits of Political Responsibility*

To hold the State wholly responsible for the failure of the individual is plainly worse than futile; but the inverse error, of assuming a load greater than any man can carry, is scarcely less common and no less disastrous. The 'disillusion' that comes from feeling too acutely the burden of the world is a weakness common amongst the young people of our time: they see so many things that they would wish to change, and they feel the intricacy and magnitude of the

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task so intensely, that they despair of doing anything at all. They are not content to patch up something here and to do a little good there. They see only too clearly that in the long run every measure of reform, even the most ambitious, is only a palliative; and in their anxiety to establish, not a society a little better than their own, but a Utopia that will last for ever, they feel that the whole burden of failure lies on their unhappy shoulders.

For them it is necessary to limit responsibility; and there are one or two traditional principles that would be none the worse for being underlined. Our sense of obligation should be strongest where our knowledge and our power to act are greatest, and our responsibilities are limited by those of other people. Thus in a world depending on international trade, we necessarily have some responsibility for people on whose co-operation we depend; but they too are responsible moral agents, and it is not our business to carry the whole of their burden for them, or to assume that burden to the neglect of others that are nearer and more definite. To sacrifice our own interests and those of our friends in order to serve the interests of people who are distant in space or time, is honest altruism; but to be insensitive to our personal responsibilities, yet highly<sup>1</sup> sensitive to a remote public responsibility, is a form of vanity. The man who makes a failure of two marriages, but feels deeply and ineffectually about the troubles of Chinese coolies or makes plans for the perfect society of the future, may sincerely believe that the happiness of one or two people is too petty an aim for a person of his talents; but neither by the standards of Christian morality, nor as a pattern for his own ideal society, is he altogether superior to the honest citizen who fulfils his local duties and does not look beyond them. The zeal and public spirit of such people is a useful correc-

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tive to the narrowness of those whose charity begins, and ends, at home; but when their centrifugal moral energy blinds them to familiar problems and brings them face to face with remote and overpowering difficulties, they become a nuisance to themselves and others.

The modern world produces many of these people who would like to reform it and are miserable because they lack the power. It produces comparatively few who are humble enough to use their energy in a field commensurate with their talents. Thus a great deal of moderately competent and quite useless thought and feeling is expended on national and international affairs, while local activities are drained of able and honest men. Perhaps it is an unhappy aspect of our national life that in so many matters we have short-circuited the local group, so that it fades out of sight and people see only their own limited talent and the national problem, and so worry themselves to death all to no purpose.

Apart from personal morality, which is the groundwork of all political construction, the important thing in public affairs is the quality of the effective thought given to them: quantity counts for very little, except in so far as it helps to select quality. That a large number of people should fret and worry over matters they cannot understand and cannot hope to influence is of no advantage to anyone: worry is not thinking, but a state of conflicting emotion and inconclusive judgement; and it is often the result of an uncertain vision of the limits of one's own responsibilities. To ask simple people, who find the burden of elementary education almost more than they can bear, to carry the anxiety that goes with knowledge and power, is dangerous as well as futile. One can only ask them to exercise a sense of responsibility appropriate to their talents, to decide for

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themselves what kind of authority they will accept, and to adjust their demand for rights to fit the obligations they are able to fulfil. If they find that they have been deceived through following false leaders, they must learn not to vent their spite on those on whom they mistakenly relied, but to ask why they themselves accepted an authority based not on knowledge, intellect or character but on some superficial snobbery or on some weakness for the easy, self-deceiving view. The democratic citizen is responsible for judging the character and ability of his elected representatives, and to do this he has to know something about politics himself; but it is not his business to assume the anxieties and responsibilities of a cabinet minister.

In the long run, our duties, responsibilities, and obligations are not burdens independently accepted: they are bound up with our aims and aspirations, and with our conviction of the value of existence; their recognition forms a surer basis of development and progress than the demand for rights, and their evasion leads to frustration and unhappiness. The individual can find no lasting satisfaction unless he sets himself an aim beyond his own immediate grasp; and no society can be reasonably contented unless among all its diverse activities there is a fixed determination to pay to the future the debt that it owes to the past. But the practical responsibilities of our society as a whole, like those of a democratic citizen, are not unlimited. In general, our duty is to preserve the sense of value that has been transmitted to us, to hand on our knowledge and skill unimpaired, or with any improvement that we can devise, and to expend no more of the world's resources than is commensurate with the moral and intellectual increment that we contribute. To ruin land as it has been ruined in Australia, America, and parts of Europe, is unforgivable; but

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there is nothing wrong in using our resources at such a rate that the world's supply of oil would be exhausted in 200 years, and the world's coal in 500 years, for within that time we can reasonably expect these forms of energy to be supplemented by others, such as the power of the tides and solar radiation.

Within limits such as these, we have a right to enjoy ourselves: it is not our duty to worry about the infinite future and the ultimate fate of man or earwig. Our business is to undertake limited practical reforms, not to invent a foolproof Utopia that will last for ever. If we perform our limited duties, our children will be no less honest and no less able than ourselves, and their responsibilities will begin where ours have ended.

## *Chapter 11*

### THE REALITY OF EVIL

#### *The Necessity of Evil*

To many people, and especially to those who have some feeling for the Christian values, the most puzzling feature of the world is the existence of suffering and evil; and they try to solve the problem by saying that evil does not exist at all. They take refuge in scientific naturalism, or turn to some religious substitute that draws a sharp distinction between the world of matter and the world of spirit—a doctrine that leads towards a denial of moral responsibility for material acts. They ‘solve’ their problem and find the reassurance they were seeking; but in so doing they not only weaken the basis of responsibility but also involve themselves in hopeless contradiction and sterility.

Much of the loss of tension in the modern world is due to the popularity of these doctrines that deny the reality of evil. If our activity is to have any significance, it must be an activity of *choice*, a deliberate selection of a course that is relatively good against others that are relatively evil. The existence of a sense of value necessarily implies the existence of evil as well as good. A world devoid of evil

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would be an animal world, a world of play, in which nothing really mattered. One can perhaps imagine such a world (it is, indeed, the world portrayed in a good many modern novels, which are dull precisely because it does not matter twopence what any of the characters think or do), but it would be a retrogression, not an advance on the one we know. Evil is part of the significance man puts into the world; and to say that evil is the negation or absence of good is a mere quibble. The moral sense is a light brought into a dark room, and as it falls on each object in the room it simultaneously creates a bright side and a dark. As long as our moral sense remains, as long as we feel that there is a right direction for our efforts, we must also feel that there is a wrong direction; and sometimes we are more clearly aware of directions that are wrong than of those that are right.

That evil should exist is a necessity of our own nature. The moral sensibility is a measure of the restlessness and vitality of man, and as long as we remain lively and alert we can no more escape from it than we can escape our sensibility to time and space. To ask *why* we are aware of time and space is meaningless; to ask *why* we have a moral sense is to ask the purpose of existence, which is not an intellectual or scientific question at all, but a demand for confidence and reassurance. It is not for any conscious purpose that we are aware of time and space; it is a fixed condition of our existence, even though we may decide that our own perceptions of what is time and what is space are personal or local.

Our perceptions of moral reality are often confused and personal, like our perceptions of time and space, and there is a problem of moral relativity not unlike the problem of physical relativity. But the diversity of individual moral

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judgements need not prevent us from forming reliable and authoritative judgements in morality as we do in the sciences. Jealousy, greed, and wanton cruelty, and the loss of vitality that is called accidie or sloth, are recognized as evils by anyone who values the heritage of Western civilization; and on such foundations as these we can, with a little forethought, go on to show that other inclinations and activities are also evil.

### *Specific Evils*

The conception of evil itself, and of specific evils and vices, is something more than a matter of social convenience and casual convention; it is part of the practical wisdom built up through long ages of personal experience. If we look into them closely, we find that many of the 'prejudices' of the Christian churches are less arbitrary than they seem at first sight. The 'prejudice' against adultery, for example, is not merely the result of misguided superstition or the jealousy of the middle-aged, nor is it merely the outcome of our laws of property: it is based on permanent facts about human nature, facts that can be verified in our own experience if we choose to take the risk. In the supposed interests of his own or other people's enjoyment a man disregards the Seventh Commandment. He enjoys the escapade and repeats it. Then he discovers that people have feelings after all, that they need understanding, sympathy, loyalty and mutual help as well as occasional bed-fellows, and that the sanctity of marriage is not a shibboleth. The light-hearted profligacy that was fun at twenty-five is a nuisance at thirty-five. It is not merely that experiments in easy-going marriages nearly always fail; it is that the failure itself feels mean and shabby to all who are concerned in it. And not only that, but profligacy itself is unsatisfactory:

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*I waive the quantum o' the sin,  
The hazard o' concealin',  
But, Och! it hardens a' within,  
And petrifies the feelin'.*

The experiment that began in the name of gaiety and progress does not always end in acute unhappiness, but it leads to something far more deeply wretched and far more obviously evil, a coarsening of our own nature and a blunting of our sensibility which is felt as a lapse below the human standard. The Seventh Commandment may not be the last word in moral wisdom, it may be provisional and local, but even by humanistic standards it offers a good sound working rule, as reliable, as Newton's Laws of Motion.

In the same way, the Roman Catholic objection to artificial birth-control is based on something more reputable than the wish to maintain a cheap supply of labour and cannon-fodder. The Catholic theologian contends that the natural development of love is marriage, that the natural development of marriage is parenthood, and that on a long view the restriction of fertility is not only a sin, according to Christian standards, but an evil even by 'rational' and humanistic standards. The force of these arguments has been demonstrated in the muddled and unhappy lives of some of our own generation. They have pleasure without responsibility, and so become bored with pleasure. Having no responsibility, they are able to be fickle; being fickle, they make themselves and others miserable. Refusing the responsibilities of parenthood, they retain for a while the mental and emotional outlook of late adolescence; and then, cut off as they are from their own natural development, they become warped and stunted. The feeling that

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parents lavish on children, and old maids spend on dogs, they devote to some form of politics ; and because they are themselves abnormal they justify themselves in their own eyes by despising those who are normal. Thus even their political enthusiasm is poisoned ; they are fundamentally misanthropic.

On a strictly humanistic basis, there are strong arguments against the views of the Catholic Church in this matter. We may decide against a large family, or against any family at all, on what seem to us to be high moral grounds. Against the authority of the Church we may set up the judgements of other authorities whom we respect, or we may decide that the great majority of people are sufficiently enlightened and far-seeing to settle these matters for themselves and that our own example cannot do them any harm. But even if we are in rebellion against the Church on specific points such as these, it is important to remember that we are still within the ambit of Christian morality. Whatever our explicit beliefs may be, fundamentally we agree in recognizing certain forms of conduct and certain states of mind as evil, and we differ only in our estimate of the ultimate effects of some other forms of conduct and states of mind that are less obviously evil.

The intrusion of naturalism into modern thought, however, has been so insidious that many people cannot recognize that anything that is natural, desirable and pleasant can be evil. If they admit the reality of sin at all, they think of it as something obviously hideous and perverted, something spontaneously repulsive to the normal mind. They fail to see that if a moral code is to increase the tension of life and raise men above the level of animal existence, it must be a warning against tendencies that seem natural and pleasant. The seven deadly sins of the Western tradition—

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pride, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, avarice, and sloth—are all 'natural' and unspectacular.

### *Two Fallacies of Naturalism*

When people deny the reality of evil, or try to reduce all evils to one, or to equate them to some other fundamental reality such as ugliness or error, they become involved in endless contradictions, for even on a pragmatic view it is necessary to suppose that there are underlying resistances to our wills, which constitute an ultimate reality, however little we may know about it. To say, like Mrs. Baker Eddy, that matter, evil, error, and unreality, are synonymous, is to abolish all the distinctions by which the intellect can do its work.

The notion of sin, however, is one from which we are at all times anxious to escape. To be capable of sin is painful and humiliating, and against this humiliation our vanity sets up its own defence, which is often disguised as humility and generosity. People who would never dream of accepting the drastic simplifications of the Christian Scientist, turn to naturalism: 'Poor fellow: he could not help it. It was a natural impulse: anybody would have felt the temptation.' Of course they would. Sin is not something monstrous or impossible: it falls within the course of nature, and the fact that it seems attractive and profitable does not make it any the less evil.

To understand the physical and psychological forces that have led someone else to behave meanly or cruelly may save us from indulging in excessive and self-righteous condemnation; but the fact that an action has causes to which we can give a scientific name does not prove it to be blameless. Even if the causes were beyond the control of their victim, he must still be held morally responsible for his

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action. His fault is not that he allowed himself, through accident or miscalculation, to fall into the circumstances that 'explain' his conduct, but that he did not make himself the vehicle of any higher force that might have turned the scale. When naturalism is used to excuse as well as to explain immoral conduct, it makes the false assumption that the forces that *did* act were the only ones that could have acted. That is to say, it begs the whole question by assuming from the beginning that the individual has no freedom of will, and therefore no moral responsibility. The scientist explains an action in terms of the forces manifested in the action itself. If the offender had acted differently, the naturalistic critic would have been compelled to postulate yet another 'force' to explain his action. It is because that 'force' might, in the circumstances, have been 'higher' than those that actually appeared, and because the offender did not let it appear, that he is held morally responsible.

There is, however, another and still less scientific way in which the terminology of science can be used to obscure and confuse moral issues. In popular interpretations of psychology, unwillingness to behave in a certain way is often ascribed to an 'inhibition', and thus any conviction that a certain course of action is immoral can be said to be the result of such an inhibition. For the purposes of psychological science, this statement may be true, but there is an unpleasant flavour about the word 'inhibition', a faint suggestion of self-mutilation and of restrictions unwittingly accepted, and consequently amateur psychologists sometimes go on to argue that inhibitions are bad, and therefore moral convictions are bad.<sup>1</sup> This position is self-contradic-

<sup>1</sup> No professional psychologist would admit this argument. Freud, for example, frequently pointed out that all civilization is built on inhibitions and sublimations, the canalization of the lower impulses to serve the higher.

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tory, for it asserts that there is at least one kind of evil in the world; so they modify it, and say that moral convictions are false. Here again the argument proves nothing: the psychologist has every right to narrow the field of his inquiry by ignoring the truth of moral judgements, just as the atomic-physicist ignores the existence of smells; but if he begins with such a restriction he cannot go on to 'prove' that moral judgements are meaningless nor can the physicist 'prove' that carbylamine is odourless. His colleague, the chemist, knows very well that carbylamine smells like fish with sweaty feet.

The naturalistic outlook in ethics (if one can call total blindness an outlook) rests on a misapplication of scientific method. The moral vision of the world is something superimposed on the natural or scientific vision, and to describe an action in naturalistic terms does not make it moral. To identify the moral and the natural worlds is to escape the sense of sin and hence of responsibility. In the long run it leads not only to bad and muddled living, but also to the evaporation of any sense of the significance of life. If sin is unreal, then virtue is unreal too.

### *The Sense of Sin and the Sense of Guilt*

The moral sense, or sense of sin, is the capacity to recognize that evil is evil and good is good and that these are not merely other names for what is immediately agreeable or disagreeable. In any view of life that offers man an aim and purpose beyond his own immediate capacity, man is necessarily imperfect and sinful. If he has no aim beyond that which is attainable, he is bored and discontented; if he has an aim that engages all his powers and still remains out of reach, he must recognize his own essential imperfection.

A conviction that the human being is radically imperfect

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is thus inseparable from any view of life that gives a man an aim beyond the immediate indulgence of his impulses ; it is a strictly intellectual conviction, and it must be distinguished from that morbid condition which psychologists call a 'sense of guilt'. A morbid sense of personal guilt is a state of mind in which specific thoughts and actions are thought to be more sinful than they really are, or in which the conviction of guilt prevents spontaneous and useful social conduct. A proper sense of the general imperfection and sinfulness of man is not morbid, it is a normal condition of healthy, active, and enjoyable existence, for without it life degenerates into the meaningless, sub-human activity satirized in Aldous Huxley's early novels.

A morbid sense of guilt, even if it only takes the form of an exaggerated sensibility to real evils, is often the result of some unhappy accident, some failure early in life to win the approval of friends or parents, or to live up to standards of conduct that were impressed with misguided emphasis. It is a psychological condition familiar to priests and psychopathologists, and sometimes it can be cured. Whatever its cause, it represents an exaggerated sense of one's own importance : at times it is combined with real moral strength and moral zeal, but it has no necessary connection with these qualities, and by Christian standards (and by ordinary social standards) it is both a sickness and a vice, against which the victim ought to struggle.

The doctrine that man is essentially sinful does not imply that he is wholly evil—such a belief would be meaningless—but only that he is torn between conflicting and ineradicable impulses to good and evil. If we look on the struggle as a mere conflict of neutral impulses, the result no longer seems to matter ; and the same is true if we regard all impulses as good, or all as evil. The whole point of the comple-

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mentary conceptions of good and evil is that the struggle is important and is permanent. There are victories and defeats, but as long as life has significance the war is never finally won; and in that sense there can be no permanent moral progress.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt our own psychological history has something to do with our recognition of this (or any other) fact, but it cannot be explained away as a psychological aberration, for it rests on nothing more recondite than common experience and a belief that, other things being equal, a view that gives significance to life is better than one that does not.

### *The Possibility of Moral Progress*

People sometimes point to the abolition of slavery, the alleviation of poverty, and even the conquest of disease as evidence of moral progress: they argue that people are more kindly and less aggressive, more honest and less selfish than their forefathers a hundred or a thousand years ago. They instance the growing security of life and property, and our increasing care for the weak and the unlucky, and they deduce that moral progress is natural and inevitable. This is not quite the same as the assertion that whatever is natural is right, for it presupposes moral standards and makes a judgement of history: its weakness is not that it obscures moral standards, but that it tends to under-emphasize the need for moral effort.

If we consider the whole course of evolution, there has plainly been moral as well as intellectual progress; but the evidence that there has been any considerable moral pro-

<sup>1</sup> Of course, if we choose to say that all impulses are good, but that some are better than others, we can alter the terms of the discussion, as we can translate a problem in physics from the Centigrade scale to the Absolute scale, but the difference is purely a difference of notation. The problem remains essentially the same, but would have to be more cumbersomely expressed.

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gress in historic times is far less clear. Much of the apparent moral progress of the past two or three centuries, for example, is not moral but intellectual and commercial. People are as cruel, proud and selfish as ever, but they have learned to restrain their vices in certain circumstances because they do not pay. Their willingness to give due attention to the claims of people in remote parts of the world is not wholly a matter of moral awaking and disinterested generosity; it is partly the result of careful calculation. Our technical inventions have made it possible for us to depend on such people for our comforts, and because we are compelled to co-operate with them in our own interest we are incidentally compelled to treat them with consideration and respect.

It is true that no sharp line can be drawn between disinterested virtue and sufficiently enlightened self-interest; but one can make a rough distinction and say that virtue runs ahead of calculation, and that actions which are plainly and immediately profitable are no evidence of a high moral character. The claim that our social morality is higher than that of the past would be more convincing if there were any sign that we were conserving our resources or building for the future, or if there were any evidence of a common effort to repay to the future the benefits we have received from the past. That there have been notable improvements in the standard of social conduct is undeniable—the abolition of slavery and the establishment of something like an equal law for all are achievements that did not rest wholly on self-interest—but these were our forefathers' achievements, not ours, and the fact that they have set us a new standard of habitual social conduct does not prove that there has been any intensification in the moral effort of the individual. However notable the exceptions and reactions may have been, a period in which individual enterprise and

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public service were inextricably confused with personal acquisitiveness, and the whole amalgam was made the basis of business practice and economic theory, can scarcely be said to have reached a high level of moral effort; and the popularity of the doctrine that we are morally better than our predecessors suggests smugness and complacency rather than any firm determination to reach a new level, or even to maintain what has been so precariously achieved.

The measure of social vitality and health is not the level of achievement, but the moral pressure, the intensity of moral effort. If our vitality is to remain, we must feel that there is a right direction and a wrong direction for our efforts: we must be conscious of conflicting impulses in ourselves, and we must be conscious of them as impulses to good and evil. A healthy community will overcome some special evils or drive them out of one field into another where they do less obvious harm, but it will never become satisfied or complacent. Its own vision, its interpretation of life as an effort away from some things and towards others, will reveal new difficulties as fast as it overcomes the old; and the intensity of moral effort must be maintained if life is not to lose its value and significance.

A true moral outlook can therefore never be directed towards a limited objective: it must work on the donkey-and-carrot principle, the aim receding as we advance. In one important sense such an outlook is disheartening, for it means that we can never reach perfection; yet any other outlook must end either in disillusion or in the relaxation that follows the first flush of achievement. To aim at something that we recognize as unattainable is the clearest way of demonstrating that we are not wholly at the mercy of material forces and animal needs, and that we know that the reward is in the effort, not in the achievement.

## EVILS AND MISERIES

### *Evils and Miseries*

The illusion of rapid moral progress arises largely from a confusion of the 'evils' that spring from our own nature, and 'miseries' such as disease, drought, earthquakes. For the first, our moral responsibility is direct, for the second it is not. In the field of evils—among gluttony, pride, sloth, envy, and avarice—there is no permanent and general progress, but only the endless struggle of the individual. In the field of 'miseries' there can be permanent gains, and it is here that knowledge is power and that the intellect can most directly serve the moral will.

The liberal reformer often confuses evils and miseries, and thereby fails to see that the need for moral effort is permanent. The existence of miseries presents the human being with problems that call for effort and self-sacrifice, but their alleviation does nothing to make humanity better and nobler; and in the long run it may not even make humanity happier, for our sensibility to discomfort and inconvenience increases as we abolish old discomforts. And some of the miseries, such as war, that the reformer sets out to cure, themselves depend on causes that include the permanent human evils. A policy of reform and progress will inevitably fail if it does not recognize how deep-seated these evils are; and a policy that rests on enlightened self-interest will do nothing to intensify man's moral effort. It will merely drive gluttony and avarice out of one field into another. Such policies are wrong not in their aims but in their outlook. In so far as they rest on false ideas of the nature of man they represent an extravagant waste of moral energy and enthusiasm.

If people approach one of the miseries of existence with the easy and self-righteous confidence that goes with false

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simplification and mistaken views about the moral nature of man, they are likely to be disheartened by the apparent indifference of other people or to be baffled by the practical failure of their remedies. They find that the abolition of scarcity and war is not easy, and because they cannot see the real difficulties in the way, they become cynical or indifferent or pessimistic. The sense of mission wears itself out in a bog of imponderable difficulties, and the young idealist grows into a middle-age which he calls 'disillusioned', not because he has shed any of his false ideas, but because he has given up all thought of disinterested moral effort. Reformers like Mr. Wells are overcome by a vague sense of frustration : like a man blundering into booby-traps in a dark room, they feel that the world is against them.

To ask that laws and international agreements should conform to principles of justice is itself right and practical ; and to legislate in such a way that, if the laws are to work at all, men will be called upon to show an increasing sense of responsibility and an increasing understanding of the consequences of their own actions, is to take a very right and necessary risk. But to base laws and treaties on the assumption that all men are virtuous and all interests identical, or to assume that legislative reform will make men morally better, is a piece of misguided and dangerous 'idealism'. The direction in which envy, avarice and sloth find their outlet can be influenced by legislation, but legislation does not create the vices themselves, nor can it abolish them. Vices are as real and as objective as brick walls and slippery pavements, and we cannot hope to circumvent them unless we see them clearly.

But to see any problem of reform in its full intricacy, to understand that well-intentioned actions sometimes do harm, and that evil actions sometimes do good, to recog-

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nize not only that our own spontaneous impulses are confused and conflicting, but also that some of them are evil, is to abandon all hope of easy progress. For that reason it is sometimes said that knowledge weakens virtue and dries up the springs of action, and people point to men like the late Lord Balfour, whose magnificent capacity to see the pros and cons of every question sometimes hindered him from making any practical decision at all. Unless we retain a strong sense of right and wrong, and understand that indecision is itself a vice, there is certainly a danger that understanding may develop into a real pleasure in pointing to difficulties instead of overcoming them. The political realist—and, for that matter, the classical poet—is always grimly determined not to allow himself the luxury of false hopes, and in his determination to accept the facts he sometimes assumes that trivial and accidental circumstances are immutable and permanent. Thus, at various times, war, pestilence and unemployment have been regarded as ‘acts of God’ beyond human understanding and control. One of the most moving and most classical of English poems, Gray’s *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, falls into the error of accepting as fixed and unalterable social conditions that were not beyond the wit of man to master, and which have since been modified.

The fact that evils are necessary, that miseries are hard to cure, and that we become sensitive to new miseries as fast as we get rid of the old, is no reason for indifference and inaction. Serenity implies an understanding of the limits of our own responsibility, not a denial or evasion of responsibility. To say that good transcends evil, and that miseries are permanent and recurrent, is true if we regard it as a step towards tranquil and decided action; it is the most horrible blasphemy if we interpret it as an excuse for

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ignoring the suffering and injustice of the world. We are certain to be disappointed if we believe that legislation and social reform will make people morally better or that the conquest of miseries will make them permanently happier; and the attempt to base morality on utopianism or on enlightened self-interest will always fail. But the alternative need not be a hopeless and inert fatalism disguised as philosophic understanding; it can also be a limited yet lively sense of personal responsibility, a recognition of the permanent and inscrutable reality of evil, and of the endless need for moral effort.

### *Substitutes for the Devil*

The reality of evil cannot be evaded, but when our efforts to alleviate the miseries of the world are frustrated, or when we find that our success brings not satisfaction but either boredom or a sharpened sensitivity to old discomforts, it is always easier to ascribe our failure to some external agency than it is to blame ourselves or our illusions. We turn our attention to Bolshevism or Capitalism, Fascism or the Jews, and we say that if only these causes could be eradicated the world would be perfect, or at any rate more tolerable. All these external Devil-substitutes are forms of self-justification; they turn our attention away from our faults; and when we fail in any of our aims, they lead us not to a new effort in which we might succeed, but to futile and self-righteous indignation. Furthermore, as Devil-substitutes they are all inadequate: no group of people, and no doctrine or economic system, is wholly evil; and the habit of blaming these external forces is itself dangerously misleading, for it tempts us to expend a great deal of misplaced emotion on the name without bothering to look carefully and impartially at the thing itself.

## SUBSTITUTES FOR THE DEVIL

If we must name one single cause for all the varied miseries and evils of the world, it is much better to call it the Devil. In so doing, we recognize it as capable of acting on our own souls and perverting our own judgement; by making it distinct from any particular human manifestation of evil we leave ourselves free to recognize the good in social forces that we happen to dislike; and by thinking of the spirit of evil as a person we avoid the false simplification that comes from thinking of it as a political or economic creed.

But the Devil is out of fashion: the materialist cannot think of him except as a figure of fun with cloven hoofs and a curious tail; and even the rational theologian, with his logical proofs of the existence of God, refrains from urging very strongly the corresponding proofs of the existence of the Devil. There is very little comfort to be drawn from blaming a non-existent Devil for our misfortunes and our suffering, and so, if we still believe that man is naturally good but do not find the world as happy or as comfortable as we would wish, we are compelled to blame ‘whatever brute or blackguard made the world’. We ascribe to the nature of things the evil we no longer recognize in human nature. This curious but not uncommon attitude depends on a curious mixture of belief and disbelief. Hardy and Housman, who were its chief exponents, possessed an acute moral sensibility, but it was directed outwards rather than inwards; they could see the evils and miseries of the world, and they believed in God enough to feel that the responsibility was His and not theirs, but not enough to have any faith in His wisdom or to feel that they had any duty towards Him. In their attempt to explain their own moral vision they built up a picture of a creator who is clumsy, coarse, and absent-minded, a creator whose impulses to

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good and evil are confused and conflicting, a creator who often means well, but lacks the power or the persistence to put his intentions into effect. In short, they rebuilt the Christian picture of man, and called it God.

In part, the popularity of this equivocal view was the result of the disappointment of nineteenth-century hopes: a scapegoat was needed, and it was more comforting to call the scapegoat God than to call it man, especially if one contrived not to believe very seriously in the objective existence of God. In its perverse way it was a consoling view, and it naturally commended itself to the disappointed liberal optimist. But it leaves man with no function except to suffer and endure, and its assertion that the world contains much more ill than good is curiously unselfconscious. Any outlook that makes life significant must offer work for us to do; it must reveal evil as well as good, miseries as well as joys. But to say that there is more evil than good in the world is nothing more than an expression of weariness and chagrin. We ourselves are part of the world, and the very fact that we can see and dislike the world's evils is evidence of the world's capacity and will for good. A world in which we could see no evil would be meaningless; and in this real and practical sense the existence of evil is itself a kind of good.<sup>1</sup> Only if we deny our own moral responsibility and regard ourselves as standing outside the course of nature does the perception of evil become distorted into a vision of the world as fundamentally hostile to humanity. Stoicism is a nobler doctrine than hedonism, and it includes greater elements of truth, but by placing the emphasis on endurance rather than responsibility it is at once more consoling and less effectual than the moral outlook of Christianity. It is a

<sup>1</sup> It is in this sense, too, that God can be said to be more real than the Devil, a higher conception implying the lower, as the human body implies the cell.

## THE BURDEN OF IMPERFECTION

doctrine of defeat and decay, and it is not a doctrine out of which any great good can emerge.

### *The Burden of Imperfection*

By humane and naturalistic standards, there is something radically unjust in the nature of the moral law. It is like the radical injustice of military necessity; and indeed the discipline of war is only a distortion and contraction of the discipline that is inevitable in the more permanent war against evil, ignorance and ugliness. As in war the untenable position must be held and worn-out men must march another mile, so in ordinary affairs of conduct a durable belief must ask of men more than is possible. '*Il faut toujours exiger des hommes plus qu'ils ne peuvent faire, afin d'en avoir tout ce qu'ils peuvent faire.*' To admit any relaxation is to reduce the demand to what is possible, and the possible will contract to what is natural, and the natural to our own whims and inclinations, until the whole point of effort and endurance vanishes, and a revulsion of feeling leads us back to demand the unendurable. The moral struggle gives intensity and dignity to human life because it demands more than is possible; but in such a struggle our failure is inevitable, and the inevitability of our ultimate failure must seem unbearable.

In the philosophy of Hobbes and other defenders of autocracy we find this conviction of the inevitability of human failure and frustration expressed with a kind of malignant satisfaction. They depict the ordinary man as mean, credulous, spiteful and stupid, and they maintain that human vices are ingrained and ineradicable. But an outlook which leads to that point and not beyond it is intolerable. It is the doctrine of Original Sin, without the complementary doctrine of Redemption; it is atheism, with-

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out the optimistic belief in human perfectibility that makes liberal atheism tolerable. No outlook that ignores the relation between man and his moral aims can give value and dignity to human existence; but by itself the doctrine leads to pessimism and despair.

A purely political view such as that of Hobbes gives only a partial answer to the personal problem: the individual is told that he must subordinate himself to the State, but he is not told how, individually or collectively, he can escape from the burden of error and fallibility. If our recognition of our own essential imperfection is to be a spur to action it must be apprehended not by the rational intelligence alone but by the whole mind; and it cannot be apprehended without shame and horror. To see the evil in things attractive in prospect and pleasing in the pursuit, and then to doubt one's power of judgement and to know that no human authority is final and absolute, is to feel the need for some certainty and reassurance that cannot be given by honour, riches, scientific knowledge, or the authority of the State. And this need is forced upon us not by religious dogma, nor by any psychological perversion, but by the impact of our own experience on our desire to find a value and significance in life.

## *Chapter 12*

### THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

#### *The Necessity of Religion*

The recognition of evil does not call for any special spiritual insight: it is the product of common experience and the natural reason; and the natural reason itself, through its capacity to recognize tradition and authority, can reduce our prejudices, our scruples, and our vague intuitions, to some authoritative order. For the people of Western Europe, that order must be something very near to the order of Christianity. Whether we accept Christianity or not, we have to admit that Christianity has provided the central moral tradition from which all our secular moralities derive. Whatever the West may have learned from Buddha or Confucius, however great its debt may be to Plato and the Greeks, the Bible has been the main source of its moral knowledge, the main influence that has concentrated its moral energy, and the main vehicle that has gathered up to itself all the diverse revelations of other sources. The natural reason itself does not compel us to believe in the literal inspiration of the Bible, but it forces us to recognize the moral authority of the Ten Commandments, the Parables, the Beatitudes, and the Two Commandments of the New

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Testament. There is no other source that speaks with the same authority, none that accords so closely with what seem to us the promptings of our own instinctive judgement, and none that stands so near to the dictates of far-sighted practical wisdom.

Our own translations, interpretations and applications of the Biblical tradition may be obscure, conflicting, or corrupt; but as in the sciences we believe that the order of our laws and observations, however imperfect, arises from some underlying structure of events, so here we believe that beyond the authoritative order there is an absolute order that is never wholly or certainly revealed. Unless the scientist held some such belief, his whole work would become a nightmare of uncertainty and aimlessness; and unless we believe that the known moral order approximates to an absolute moral order, and with such authority that no individual is likely to be able to correct it to more than an infinitesimal extent, we too find ourselves in a nightmare.

But we need something more than practical moral certainty, and something more than a perception of imperative and authoritative values. Indeed, the moment that we arrive at that perception, we see our own fallibility and feel it intensely. If we admit a moral authority at all, we admit that we ourselves are imperfect; and unless we are to be reduced to the deepest pessimism we must find a doctrine that, while it does not relieve us of our moral obligations, nevertheless makes our burden endurable. A conviction of underlying moral certainty needs to be supplemented by a doctrine of individual redemption.

The nearest refuge is in the authority of the State: to themselves as a group, people ascribe powers they would never claim as individuals, and the citizen finds himself redeemed from his own uncertainty and imperfection by

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playing a part within an organization that is treated as divine and perfect. Such a notion is repugnant to the Anglo-Saxon; he is willing to recognize his own imperfection, but he sees the State not as an organism of which he is a cell or an atom, but as a community of individuals adjusting themselves to each other, and not possessing collectively any virtue or intelligence that is not rooted in their individual qualities. The State is not a 'higher' organization than man, but an incidental product of man's social habits.

If we cannot get rid of our personal responsibility and uncertainty by identifying ourselves with some limited historical movement, we need the conception of a living God, that is to say, of a living purpose in history. In Comte's positivism this living purpose is identified with conscious human aims, and it therefore becomes a 'natural' purpose. But a purpose that will transfigure and redeem a strictly 'natural' view cannot itself be 'natural'; nor can it be defined within the limits of what is known already, for it has to include the knowledge and new perceptions of the future. If it is to add a new dimension to the human picture and to give it value and direction, it cannot be a conception of the material or the biological order; nor can it be a stone blocking the way of further investigation, for its own recognition and manifestation depend on complete freedom of investigation. It must therefore be, in some sense, supernatural; and this supernatural purpose, since we must necessarily envisage it in familiar terms, is best envisaged in terms of the highest and most complex entity we know, a human personality.

The most elaborate and most authoritative exposition of such a purpose is found in the Christian doctrine of the relation of God to man. In the Christian view, our duties and responsibilities are defined with more than human

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authority in the Christian revelation, and man is redeemed from the burden of his inevitable failure through the willing sacrifice of God Himself in Christ. Some doctrine of this kind is necessary, even by pragmatic and survivalist standards, and without it the whole of our knowledge falls into uncertainty and aimlessness. There is no point in aiming at human survival unless we feel that human life is valuable; there is no standard by which we can judge the conflicting 'truths' that are convenient for all our trivial purposes unless we assume an underlying order and purpose; there is no release from the burden of our own imperfection except in some 'supernatural' doctrine. To the doctrines of the pragmatist and survivalist, some backbone of conviction is necessary; and there is no such backbone except Christianity. When there is a strong belief that the known moral law springs from the will of God, not only is morality strong, but also life is felt to have significance and value; when that faith decays into a belief in prudence, convenience, and relative values without absolute foundations, then morality decays and life is no more than a pointless struggle for existence.

By arguing in this way, we are judging Christianity by the standards of the pragmatist; we are demonstrating that Christian belief is convenient, and therefore true by pragmatic standards. But an argument of this kind cannot establish the truth of Christianity in any absolute sense; people have often held a false belief that happened to be convenient, but they never believe a thing solely because they see that it would be convenient to do so. Unless the truth of Christianity can be established independently, the mere fact that it is convenient will not compel belief. All that we can do by proving the convenience of Christianity is to remove some obstacles to belief.

## THE FAILURE OF RATIONAL 'PROOFS'

### *The Failure of Rational 'Proofs'*

For anyone brought up in the empirical and pragmatic tradition of the Anglo-Saxon countries, intellectual 'proofs' of religion will always seem to leave a hole at the centre. We can show that there is a need for religion, and we can show what kind of religion is needed, but no argument from material fact or from our natural knowledge of morality and man can ever convince us that religion is true. It is as if we tried to prove the existence of life from our knowledge of physics and chemistry alone. Since our chemical knowledge is coloured by our knowledge of the chemistry of living beings, we might deduce the possibility and even the necessity of life, but we could not argue a rabbit or a tadpole into existence.

In somewhat the same way our moral and material knowledge is coloured by our spiritual perceptions, and therefore our arguments lead us to infer the existence of spiritual truths. But they offer no revelation of God or of the soul of man, and to a confirmed atheist they are as unconvincing as our biological argument would be to a confirmed non-vitalist. The fact is that any argument must beg the question. The terms we use are tinged with our beliefs, and to anyone who does not accept our belief the terms will have a slightly different meaning; and the argument, however rigorous, will seem at some stage to pass beyond the realm of fact into a realm that is purely verbal.

It is this difficulty that defeats every attempt to 'prove' the existence of God. If we believe that the rules of logic are self-evident truths, and that all the large abstractions—time, man, spirit, virtue, eternity—are absolute, inscrutable realities, then we can prove the logical necessity of a prime mover and infinite spirit, and so convince ourselves of the

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reality of religion and of God. Among people brought up to speak the English language, this abstract habit of mind is rare; at the best they give intellectual assent to such arguments, but they remain unmoved by them. Like Cowper's friend, they are 'confuted but not entirely convinced'; and they retain their deep-seated conviction that logic is an empirical and fallible science, and that our knowledge of particulars is more certain than our knowledge of abstract concepts and general properties. To the average educated Englishman, the scholastic proofs of the existence of God seem to prove nothing but the existence of a word.

This was Pascal's attitude to logical proofs of the existence of God: it was not the existence of God that he doubted, but the validity of logic. He was more certain of religion than of logic, and had no use for a belief that could be, by dependence, inferior in status to the truth of logic. If religion is to have a real value, it must be neither contrary to logic, nor dependent on it, but prior to it. This is what the agnostic feels when he fails to be convinced by a rigorous intellectual proof, and therefore calls it 'purely verbal'.

The feeling that abstract argument is nebulous and unreliable, and that our most certain knowledge is the knowledge of particulars that we gain through direct experience, is so deeply ingrained in the Anglo-Saxon tradition that we cannot hope to displace it. Our practical frame of mind, our insistence on works as well as on faith, our distrust of verbal ingenuity, all these accord with it; our material prosperity and our proficiency in the sciences spring from it; it is the basis of our Protestantism and our insistence on the individual's duty to judge for himself; and it underlies our preference for democracy, for we believe that the individual is real, and that the State is an abstraction which

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has no reality beyond that of a group of individuals. As in our social affairs we prefer disorder to injustice, so in our beliefs we think it more important to be able to verify them in our own experience than to be logically coherent. Before the abstract arguments of the Christian realist can be convincing, our respect for the knowledge and experience embodied in the rules of logic and in abstract conceptions needs to be so strong that the step from human and authoritative probability to divine and absolute certainty seems natural and easy. But in the Anglo-Saxon tradition the sense of authority is weak, and we never allow it to carry us far beyond the range of our own experience and verification.

It is this ineradicable nominalism that gnaws away all the proofs that are convincing to the scholastic realist; and unless it is supplemented by religious experience it leads towards pragmatism and scepticism. Thus we can demonstrate the need for responsibility, we can show that evil and good are real, and that human knowledge is fallible; we can go on to show that any moral system stultifies itself unless it treats the human being as radically imperfect; we can argue that such a view is unendurable unless the human being is in some way redeemed from his imperfection and uncertainty; but in all this we do not touch the centre of the problem. We show that religion is necessary, that it is not contrary to experience and reason, but we cannot prove that it is true.

In this, religion does not differ from any other field of knowledge. We can argue ourselves black in the face proving that cats are logically possible and that a belief in cats is necessary to our mental health, but if we set more store by the 'correspondence' test of truth than by any other, the only way to convince ourselves of the reality of cats is to

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go out and look at one. The purpose of logical argument is to correlate and objectify the evidence of our senses, not to replace it; and the sceptic has no right to ask for a convincing argument for the truth of religion: the most that he can expect is a convincing demonstration of the need for religious belief; and a proof that such a belief would not contradict the beliefs he already holds. All that we can do by argument is to remove the barriers that hinder us from exploration in one particular direction.

There is, in the long run, nothing irreconcilable between the realist and the nominalist approach; the difference is one of emphasis. For the nominalist, the primary need is experience, whereas for the realist it is logical demonstration; and if both are conscientious and open to experience their findings must converge. Both need the conviction that there is a purpose in history, that human effort is directed towards something more than the satisfaction of animal needs, and that behind the appearance of human knowledge there is a reality that is both absolute and valuable. The danger for the realist is that he may attach too much importance to purely verbal operations; the danger for the nominalist is that he may close his mind and senses to some kinds of evidence.

### *The Appeal to Experience*

Just as we can infer the existence of other people from facts about the world of matter, so we can infer the existence of God from facts about the world of matter and of people; but it is doubtful if we would ever do so if the idea of God were not already in our minds, or if it were not presented to our minds simultaneously with the material and living world. And if our knowledge of God is to be anything more than our knowledge of any one of the various kinds of

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mathematical infinity, either it must find support in our own experience, or else it must rest on absolute confidence in other people's testimony. Provided that it accords with things we already know, a belief that rests wholly on other people's testimony need not be classed as superstitious—most of our knowledge of history and geography is of this kind—but because the knowledge of religion introduces new tensions and complexities into life, the protestant and empirical temper will still ask for something more than sober and corroborated testimony, for some evidence of authenticity, some faint adumbration of the experience that was so precise and vigorous to the apostles and the saints.

The germ of such an experience is found in the vague awareness, common to all humanity, that in spite of all our perplexities and difficulties, our own lives have a value and a purpose beyond our own understanding. This sensation is not merely a reaction from self-questioning and doubt, for it gives us something more than an answer to our questions. At its strongest and clearest it is a sensation of contact with a force beyond ourselves, a feeling that whatever our own responsibilities may be, the ultimate burden is not ours. Like falling in love, it is an intense realization of something *other* than ourselves; it is at once a sensation of exaltation and release and a recognition of new responsibilities. We become aware not only of our knowledge of God, but also of God's knowledge of us. However dimly, we see our course defined, and we know that henceforward we are dedicated: and this we feel with a sense of welcome and absolute obligation quite different from the nagging pressure of generally accepted interests and values. Our own lives become trivial in comparison with the purpose that acts in us and through us.

More commonly, it is nothing more than a slightly un-

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comfortable feeling that the answer is there if we choose to take it, that it will not be found in any other way, and that the answer is a Person, waiting with an incredible and terrifying patience that we prefer not to contemplate. If we avoid the presence, if we refuse to open the door any wider, then we need to argue the presence away—sometimes by a flat denial, and sometimes more subtly, by convincing ourselves that the presence at the door is an illusion, and that in disregarding its mute appeal we are earnestly seeking for the reality which is, we firmly and unconvincingly tell ourselves, elsewhere.

It is the loss of this sensation that produces not only a feeling of the uselessness and insignificance of everything, but also the infinite loneliness of which the atheist so often complains. He knows very well that something is missing from his world, and he is quite right in feeling that the experience of religion begins somewhere near to this eerie and unhappy sensation. But this queer nostalgia is not so much a cause of religious conviction as a consequence of its absence. It follows from the atrophy of a once-active religious sensibility, a sensibility that can be lost as easily as the sensibility to poetry or natural beauty. We can lose it through casual neglect, or we can discredit it in the interests of scientific economy. Intellectually, we can do without the notion of God as the solipsist does without that of other people and the behaviourist does without himself; but in practical affairs it is not quite so easy to play the ostrich. The reality we claim to ignore insists on making itself felt; and it is better that our recognition of it should be as open and direct as possible. If our memory and awareness of the religious experience grow dim, they can be renewed through prayer or meditation. We can throw ourselves open to the experience again, or by looking into

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our own thought and conduct we can remind ourselves that we were all the time admitting the reality under some other name or without a name at all.

To give the solipsist a routine or formula for apprehending the reality of other people is impossible: it is one of the earliest things we do as children, and if we had never done it we would not be arguing about solipsism at all. In the same way, we cannot give a formula for prayer or for those intense forms of religious experience that are called mystical. We can only ask the sceptic whether he can think of any cause that he values more than he values his own life, or whether he can see in the lives of other people evidence of some experience that excites not merely respect but reverence. For the sceptic who stubbornly insists on regarding prayer not as inward honesty but as supernatural blackmail,<sup>1</sup> there is only the hope of something beyond our influence or control, some 'accident' that may reopen his eyes. What people cannot find on the familiar road of prayer or in the revelation of the Bible, they can sometimes find along some by-road of their own, as Wordsworth found it in the scenery of Westmorland or as Pascal found it in sudden illumination after long and painful thought, and it may come upon them unexpectedly and with overwhelming force.

The religious experience is not simply a sensation of self and other; it implies and includes the existence of other people, as the recognition of other people implies and includes the recognition of the world of matter. And as the recognition of other people imposes material obligations on us, so the awareness of God implies social and personal

<sup>1</sup> There is, of course, a sense in which all prayer is an appeal for a miracle, for the manifestation of the higher through the lower. But it is not, or ought not to be, an appeal for specific material miracles for their own sake.

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obligations, and of these humility is one. We are not at liberty to interpret our own spiritual experience at random: we are given, not a final and absolute revelation of truth, but a token of the authenticity of a tradition, a tradition in which we ourselves have a place. In so far as we accept the presence as a dedication, we are relieved of a super-human burden of uncertainty and guilt; but we are not made perfect and omniscient even though, in the Christian phrase, we participate in perfection. We still need to interpret our experience in the light of history and human knowledge: the difference is that we now know that there is something to interpret and that it cannot be explained away as mere illusion.

### *The Case Against Christianity*

It is not easy to trace to a single source the arguments that have made a whole generation reluctant to believe that there can be any truth at all in Christianity. Some of the arguments commonly urged against Christianity carry so little weight that it is difficult to regard them as anything more than excuses invented to justify a position already chosen for other reasons. The argument, for example, that God is unjust, because he allows evils and miseries to exist, derives from a failure to understand that the possibility of evils and miseries derives from our own nature and is a condition of the existence of good. Again, the argument that it is selfish to save one's own soul—which is suggested by the very real selfishness of some Christians—can easily degenerate into a mere quibble depending on the ambiguous vagueness of the word 'selfish'; and some of the arguments about the incompatibility between religion and modern science are equally trivial, for they depend on using a more or less mature critical power to ridicule a

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theology which is derived not from the teaching of Christian theologians, but from a vague memory of the very simple doctrines understood in childhood.

Apart from trivialities such as these, however, there are at least eight objections that deserve to be seriously considered :

- (1) The unique historical event implied in the doctrine of the Incarnation, which destroys the continuity of history and of natural causes.
- (2) The miracles, which contradict an immense body of accumulated experience.
- (3) The absolute distinction between man and animals, which is contrary to biological method.
- (4) The close relation between Christianity and superstition, and between Christianity and other religions, which seems to dispose of any claim to authority or uniqueness.
- (5) The rigidity of Christian moral teaching, with its ideas of blessedness and damnation.
- (6) The obscurantism of Church dignitaries in matters of philosophy and science.
- (7) The indifference of the Church, as an institution, to the claims of social justice.
- (8) The corruption and sinfulness of the lives of Christians, judged by Christian standards.

The fifth of these objections carries less weight than the others. Christianity certainly implies an absolute obligation to moral effort, but there is no reason why its doctrines should be interpreted in a childish fashion, and the form of its moral guidance, as expressed in the Parables and the Beatitudes, or in the personality of its saints and martyrs, leaves room for endless adaptation to changing circum-

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stances. Unless one is activated by a strong wish to excuse some private vice or to defend one's past record, it is not easy to maintain that the Parables do not fit the modern world. The difficulty for most people is that they are not explicit enough, and need authoritative exposition. The difficulty is one inherent in language: we can have the precision of abstract commandments, or we can have the generality of a parable, but we cannot have both at once.

Of the other objections, the last three are directed against Christians rather than against Christianity; but they are none the less serious if it can be proved that Christian belief makes people more stupid and more selfish than they would otherwise be. Of this, there is no evidence at all. Christians are corrupt and fallible, and they are sometimes too much concerned with their own personal salvation and too little inclined to remember that man's duty to his neighbour stands second only to his duty to God. At times they may commit errors in the name of their religion, and at other times they may use their religion to excuse their own faults. But the standards by which the critic condemns them are themselves Christian standards that have been developed and preserved by the Christian Church. It is certainly and shamefully true that the Church, as an institution, has seldom, if ever, led the way in social reform; but the failure of Christians and 'Christian' countries to act according to the law of Christ does not prove the law to be wrong; and the critic of Christianity is sometimes applying to Christians a higher standard than he would apply to other people.<sup>1</sup> The Christian churches, as institutions, have

<sup>1</sup> If we are to compare the social teaching of the Church with the ideals put forward by secular reformers in our own time, it is only fair to examine Christian doctrines as they are expressed to-day. The critic who wishes to consider the Christian view of property and social justice should examine the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* and some such document as *The Churches Survey Their Task*.

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not always condemned violence and social injustice, and Christian countries have certainly failed to conquer the miseries of war and poverty—partly because they do not regard these miseries as the only evils in the world—but their record cannot be said to be worse than that of Islam, or of Buddhist China or Hindu India.

The legend that the Christian Church has always been opposed to intellectual discovery is mainly the outcome of sectarian prejudice. From the time of Roger Bacon and Nicolas of Cusa down to the Abbé Mendel and our own day, there is a long and continuous line of Christian students of science. It is natural and almost inevitable that the study of material science should at times produce a metaphysical outlook that leaves no place for doctrines meant to conserve the highest values, and it is equally natural that the forces of intellectual conservatism should from time to time press the banner of religion into their service. But the instances of actual repression and obscurantism are more familiar than numerous,<sup>1</sup> and there are many instances of less blatant but no less effective repression on the part of learned academies. If the Inquisition placed the works of Kepler on the Index, the Royal Society succeeded in losing Waterson's paper on the Kinetic Theory of Gases for forty

<sup>1</sup> The notorious and shocking cases were those of Bruno and Galileo, condemned by the Inquisition, and Servetus, burned by the Protestants at Geneva. Torture, imprisonment and execution are no methods of conducting an argument, but for anyone who has looked into the matter it is not easy to sympathize with Bruno or Servetus. Both were spiteful, truculent and vain, their scientific 'discoveries' were purely speculative and were mixed up with a great deal of nonsense. (See W. Boultling, *Giordano Bruno*, and Nordenskiöld, *History of Biology*.) The case against Galileo was weaker, his punishment was less, and many Catholic prelates warmly supported him. His doctrine that measurable qualities are more 'real' than secondary or subjective qualities was the beginning of modern science, but it also created most of the difficulties of modern philosophy, and like the cosmological theory of Copernicus, Kepler and Bruno, it is not a doctrine that the modern scientist would defend with any great vigour. (See Burtt, *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*.)

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years, and in never reading Lomonosov's earlier researches at all.

### *The Anthropological Argument*

However sincerely these objections to Christians and Christian institutions may be held, they are weakened by impartial consideration of the facts, and it is doubtful whether they have ever played a large part in turning the current of thought against Christian doctrine. A far stronger force has been the apparent similarity between religion and superstition, and the obvious intrusion of 'superstitious' beliefs into every known religion. These superstitions sometimes serve a useful purpose for the individual, as the superstitious fatalism of the soldier serves a purpose, but either they can never be verified ('every bullet has its billet') or else they flatly contradict the known facts.

A study of the history of religion is inclined to undermine any belief in religion itself. We see, step by step, man's inner needs dictating his view of the outer world; his fear of the spirits of the dead gives rise to rituals for keeping them at bay; he has a passionate wish for children and good harvests and victories over his enemies; and when his rational efforts fail or are subject to forces beyond his physical control, he still needs to do *something* to relieve the tension of his helpless wish, and so he moves a stone, or cuts off a finger, or burns a bunch of dead leaves. None of these procedures and none of the beliefs by which they are 'explained' conform to our notion of outside reality; some of them are plainly silly, and others obviously cruel; yet many of them can be shown to resemble Christian belief and to be the lineal ancestors of Christian ritual. We are therefore tempted to assume that Christian doctrine is nothing more than a modernized form of ancient errors,

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an illusion based not on any external reality, but only on the inner need to disguise a practical failure or to compensate for disappointed hopes.

In much the same way, a fanatical believer in the materialist interpretation of history might point out that every step in the development of physical science was dictated by material and economic needs, and he might argue that all the science of our era is 'bourgeois' science and that 'matter' is a 'bourgeois' prejudice. But to see the social and psychological causes that shaped the development of a religious or scientific doctrine is one thing; to say that social and psychological circumstances alone produced the doctrine is another. The truth of religion must be tested in life, the truth of science in the laboratory; and the history of their origins cannot by itself enable us to assess their present value.

The difficulty at this point is fundamental: if the critic firmly refuses to admit any kind of evidence except that of the physics laboratory, he cannot be convinced. But it is important to note that the relation of Christianity to more primitive religions does not prove that Christianity contains no more truth than those religions: modern medical science derives from the science of Hippocrates and Galen, and it can be traced back to the first blundering efforts of primitive witch-doctors, but it is usually better to be treated by a qualified practitioner than by a witch-doctor.<sup>1</sup> Christianity certainly has much in common with the superstitions of the Trobriand Islanders and the early Myceans, but if we draw the inference that Christianity is therefore a primitive and outmoded superstition we might as well

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the maligned witch-doctor has the root of the matter in him, whether in religion or in science. For some agreeable stories of the practical sagacity of these 'magicians' see C. A. W. Monckton, *Confessions of a New Guinea Resident Magistrate*.

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observe that our material food also has much in common with that of primitive people, and infer that eating is a crude, unnecessary and antiquated practice.

The argument from anthropology, in fact, proves nothing unless it is combined with a general 'scientific' prejudice against the whole outlook of religion, and it is this prejudice that underlies the very strong objections to Christianity that we have not yet considered. If we regard the scientific view of the world as the only legitimate outlook, the objections are insuperable; but if the scientific view were completely satisfactory, there would be no need to consider the religious view at all. It is important to remind ourselves that it is the failure of the scientific view to give a basis for life and conduct that has driven us to re-examine the whole matter.

### *Fact and Symbol*

It is useless to evade the difficulty by talking of Christianity as a necessary myth, or by accepting its 'symbolic' truth while doubting its historic accuracy. To impose upon ourselves the burden of responsibility that is inseparable from the sense of value and of purpose, and to make that burden bearable in the face of our own limitations, we need the Christian 'myth' with its doctrine of Redemption and Revelation. But a 'myth' is not effective unless it is accepted as fact. That the 'myth' should fulfil our needs is not enough: the very fact that we can see that it fulfils those needs is enough to make us suspect it.

The modern mind is trained to see history as the working-out of 'natural' laws acting on given facts, and to keep the worlds of matter, life and spirit distinct (or at least to keep the third distinct from the other two). To such a mind, specially trained *not* to read a purpose into history,

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the whole idea of a purposeful intervention, and the frank materialism of the Incarnation, are repugnant. Yet it is precisely these conceptions that are needed by the sceptical and 'disillusioned' mind. In asking for reassurance and certainty, the sceptic is asking for a miracle, and it must be a miracle in material terms. If the purpose that activates both the individual man and the general process of history is to be effective it must manifest itself not only in the realm of spirit, but also through its intrusions into the realms of life and matter.

The whole process of science works in the opposite direction: we try to understand living creatures in terms of inert matter and to interpret the world of spirit in terms of physiology. There is nothing 'wrong' in this approach; but it has no unique merit, it is not always successful, and it necessarily ignores the conception of an overriding and justifying purpose. Science *must* be deterministic if it is to have any value as a means of forecast. Religion *must* interpret events in terms of a higher and not wholly definable purpose if it is to give a sense of responsibility and value. In the Christian view, God is a force that imposes a pattern or significance on the living world as a pear-tree imposes a pattern on the atoms of which it is composed. From the scientific point of view, we choose to ascribe the force to the atoms themselves; from a religious point of view, we say that the pear-tree as a whole takes each atom under its care. The first course, when it is successful, has the merit of making calculation possible; the second serves to remind us that we would never know of the force at all, and never ascribe the appropriate properties to the atom or the living cell, if we did not know the tree itself, or some other existence of an equal order.

The religious interpretation of history will therefore seize

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on just those elements and events that the scientist avoids or puts aside for later consideration. The scientist, dealing with the life of Christ, must try to account for the miracles and the Resurrection in terms he already knows. He will suspect exaggeration and inaccurate reporting, he will talk of mass-hypnosis, and he may invent a Messiah complex to fit the case. The Christian, as such, is not interested in these explanations, but in the moral and spiritual significance of the events.

It is very likely that from a scientific point of view the Christian story has suffered in the telling. What has been preserved is its spiritual significance, its revelation of the nature of man, the reality of God, and the nature of man's responsibilities. It may well be that some of our 'scientific' difficulties come from the material but spiritually irrelevant inaccuracies of the story. But we cannot treat the Gospels as we treat *Lear* or the *Divine Comedy*. As a poetic fiction the story is profoundly moving; as allegorical philosophy it is intensely illuminating; but the fact that the events really happened, or that events of that kind could happen, is an essential part of the philosophy and poetry. For the doctrine that the world of spirit manifests itself through the world of matter, and that matter is not in its own nature either evil or wholly cut off from participation in the world of spirit, is essential to Christianity. To make the Biblical story a 'fiction' in the sense in which the *Iliad* is a fiction, is to miss the implication that the highest qualities can manifest themselves through man, and can do so without limit, so that in the one extreme case a man is the Son of God.

The Christian case is that the story of Christ is a matter of history, and that its truth must be tested by the methods of history. It is not a matter of experimental science, for it

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deals with facts that cannot be reconstructed in the laboratory; The scientist may simplify his own task by refusing to believe those facts or by believing them only in a metaphorical and symbolic sense. In so doing, he creates for himself a situation no less unhappy than that of the Christian who sacrifices the demands of his sense of order to serve those of his sense of purpose, responsibility and human frailty.

### *The Christian Claim to Uniqueness*

The main impediment in our time to a rudimentary faith in the historic truth of the Christian story comes, not from the fact that the story was recorded and transmitted in language that paid little heed to the requirements of science, but from a curious and quite unscientific sense of justice. If we admit the claims of Christianity, what ground have we for rejecting the claims of Buddhism and Mohammedanism? If we suspend our scientific judgement when we read of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, what ground have we for refusing to admit the incarnations of the Buddha? If a divine purpose has manifested itself on earth, why not on other planets and other stars?

These questions are not unreasonable in themselves, nor are they very difficult to answer; but behind them there is often a very firm determination not to accept any answer at all. This determination springs from a feeling that whatever decisions we may make, and however scrupulous and open-minded we may be in making them, the decisions are *ours*, and therefore parochial and imperfect. But the pursuit of generality ought not to lead us to believe that all doctrines are of equal weight, and that one man's word is as good as another's. To refuse to accept any judgement that does not wholly transcend our situation in space and time is only

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one more instance of the romantic passion, not for authoritative truth, but for absolute certainty, and it is neither 'rational' nor 'scientific'.

The discoveries of astronomy, and uncertain speculations about the possibilities of life on other stars, ought not to blind us to the fact that man is, to the best of our knowledge, the centre of the universe, its highest expression of purpose and value ; and it would be a false modesty on our part that would make us forget that the tradition of Western Europe, for all its failures, its confusion, its excessive materialism, and its own uncertainty, is still not only our own tradition, but also the most scrupulous, the most highly critical, and the one that most readily gathers to itself the wisdom of other times and places. We can admit that other religions are founded on truly religious experience, yet still maintain that Christianity is wiser, more comprehensive and better authenticated than any ancient or oriental religion. To turn away from Christianity towards Indian or Tibetan mysticism, to reject the experience of St Teresa or St John of the Cross for something less exposed to the criticism of Western logic and the practical mind, is not a movement towards generality but towards intellectual ruin and confusion. To reject the Four Gospels for the Four Nikāyas, or to give them both equal weight as historical documents, is not a manifestation of scientific impartiality but of perverse and unscholarly prejudice.

### *Christianity as Possible Truth*

It is useless to pretend that these arguments will convince and convert the determined sceptic. Like the intellectual 'proofs' of the existence of God, they are arguments from the lower to the higher, and these arguments from nature to God can never be rigorous. They can weaken

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objections, but they cannot by themselves generate the act of faith that is needed in the transition from intellectual probability to moral certainty. Historians may demonstrate that the Christian story is as well authenticated as any other event of the period; but anyone for whom the scientific Principle of Limited Variety has become an ingrained habit of mind will find the Christian story harder to believe than the story of Caesar's assassination, because it is more of an impediment to any simple scientific scheme.

But although the story remains improbable to anyone engaged in the day-to-day routine work of science, and to those who worship science at a distance, a belief in something like the Christian story is plainly a social necessity. A community needs a nucleus of people who are convinced of the value and significance of life, of the radical imperfection of man, and of the ultimate possibility of forgiveness and redemption, as surely as it needs people who are devoted to the sceptical and empirical methods of science. Unless there is active hostility to religion, the influence of such a nucleus will permeate the whole community, and it will serve to maintain and fortify the implicit assumptions and the latent moral convictions that prevent a non-religious philosophy from collapsing into nihilism or degenerating into worship of the lower kinds of force.

Such a religious belief must be communal; that is to say, it must be expressed in a form that has a meaning for the very simple as well as the very wise. No doubt there are moments when naïve and elementary statements of Christian faith distress the Christian philosopher quite as much as the scientist is distressed by the naïvety and over-simplification of the elementary text-book. We cannot expect an equal standard of knowledge, understanding or faith from everyone; and the childishness of a child's religion, or the

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childishness of his science, is no reason for rejecting science and religion altogether, or for attempting to build a new science and a new religion in terms that have no connection at all with those of the elementary stages.

We cannot escape from ourselves, or from our own tradition, without cutting ourselves off not only from the past but also from our own community. If we need an historical religion at all—and a religion cannot have its full significance unless it is historical and unless at some point it contradicts the doctrines of science—we have no alternative to Christianity. The decadence of Western society in our own time, its loss of conviction and vitality, is largely due to the weakening of Christian faith. As that decadence makes itself increasingly obvious, and as the implications of a life without faith become more and more clear to the individual, there will inevitably be a movement back towards religion. At such a time, the mature authority of the Christian religion will be a bulwark against the home-made fantasies of the crank and the brutalizing force of totalitarian substitutes for religion.

It would be idle to suppose that, within any time we can foresee, the whole of Western Europe will return to the Christian faith. The roots of scepticism are too tenacious, the scientific habit of interpreting the higher in terms of the lower is too deeply ingrained, to allow of any quick reversal of the current; and the process that made atheists or agnostics of some of the nineteenth-century men of science has still to work its way down the intellectual scale. In our age, as a non-Christian writer has said, the Christian faith commends itself only to the very clever or the very ignorant. The ultimate consequences of 'scientific' scepticism are still too little felt to produce a strong reaction, and they are not likely to be fully recognized as long as a leavening or resi-

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due of Christian faith remains to infuse a sense of purpose and value into the sceptics themselves. Yet the need for a common faith persists ; and the sceptics must more and more feel that no civilization can be firm unless it is built on an enduring faith as well as on sound ideas, and that for Western Europe there is no reputable and enduring faith except that of Christianity.

## *Chapter 13*

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### HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS

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#### *The Progress of Industrial Science*

Today the rationalistic and 'progressive' outlook is still working its way down the intellectual scale, and it is closely followed by a wave of disillusion and despair. How soon that movement will exhaust its own energy will depend partly on the vigour and confidence with which it is opposed, and partly on the development of science and economics in the next few years. The significant events in history are the rebellions against the historic current, the scientific discoveries, the unforeseen reversals of opinion and outbursts of moral energy that change a people's aims and needs. Today it is clear that many of the ills of our society spring from habits of thought that have outlived their usefulness. But in general, people do not readily abandon an old belief or a lingering prejudice merely because it has been shown to be false and dangerous. Although economic pressure and the momentum of the past are not the only forces in the history of ideas, they are immensely powerful; and however necessary it may be for people to change their outlook they are not likely to do so unless they find themselves under the pressure of something more than

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argument. Here and there, a few people may give up an opinion because it is false or suicidal, and in time their example may influence others. The question today is whether that example can become effective in time, and whether the material conditions of the near future will lead people to modify their outlook without waiting for the first impact of complete disaster.

At present, in spite of disappointments and setbacks, the conservative habit of mind makes people expect the familiar acceleration of technical discovery to continue. Because there have been startling changes in the past century and a half, they expect still more drastic changes in the future. If aeroplanes travelled at 40 miles per hour in 1910 and now travel at 400 miles per hour, then a time will come when they will travel at 1,000 or 2,000 miles per hour. If trains once travelled at 30 miles per hour and their speed has now been trebled, soon it will be trebled again. If we have come to rely more and more on the standardized products of the fixed-price stores, a time will come when *all* our needs will be met by mass-production. If artificial manures have doubled the maximum yield of potatoes, there is no reason why the yield should not be doubled again. The scientists will invent faster aeroplanes, cheaper engines, richer manures; and the technical progress of the nineteenth century will be negligible in comparison with that of the twentieth.

This argument is not borne out by the facts: the greater part of the possibilities of any new device are often realized quite soon after its invention. As early as 1829 the record speed for steam-driven locomotives was sixty miles per hour, and that record has not yet been doubled. In 1884 the *Umbria* crossed the Atlantic in 5 days 22 hours; fifty-four years later the *Queen Mary's* record was only 34 per cent

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lower. Progress has not been quite as spectacular as we sometimes imagine; and just as 80 miles per hour has proved a convenient maximum for the speed of trains, so in spite of the fantasies of sensational novelists, a speed of 500 or 600 miles per hour is likely to prove a convenient practical limit for aeroplanes. There are physical as well as economic limits to the possibilities, and it is doubtful whether the present rate of innovation will be much increased.

There are, on the contrary, serious grounds for believing that industrial and scientific progress will be less rapid in the near future than it has been in the past. Science is no longer a novelty, and it is losing a little of the impetus that it gained with its first spectacular industrial successes. Scientific work becomes increasingly elaborate and expensive; and it becomes more and more difficult for any man to possess that complete and fructifying knowledge of diverse studies that has often led to brilliant discoveries. At the same time, those who turned to physical science in the hope that it would reveal an ultimate structure of reality have been disillusioned. There are no fundamental truths indubitably valid for all purposes; and there are no observations that give us absolutely certain knowledge—the very act of being seen changes the condition of a body. Every new piece of apparatus, every new way of peering at the world, gives us knowledge that partly conforms to what we know already and partly compels us to alter our interpretations. The scientists have been compelled to abandon the hope of discovering any ultimate and absolute truth, and as they settle down to the practical question of finding out how things behave when we handle them, some of the zest goes out of the experiment. One is apt to lose interest in the exploration of a bottomless pit.

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The material sciences have made possible a great increase in the world's population ; but in so doing they have created a new need and turned attention to a new outlet for intelligence and public spirit. By making war and industrial disputes more obviously disastrous they have increased the complexity and delicacy of the world's economy ; and today it is no longer fashionable for governments and millionaires to endow departments of chemistry and physics, but rather schools of economics and international relations. Even the professors of applied mathematics and biophysics find themselves more and more concerned with the social consequences of their own discoveries ; and the young student no longer turns to science in the hope that it will raise the material standard of living beyond any conceivable limit, or that it will take the place of religion, poetry and art, and solve the problems that arise from stupidity, dishonesty, social vanity, and greed. In medicine, and perhaps in biochemistry, it is still possible for the brilliant young student to feel that he is serving humanity ; but in general he is inclined to turn first to politics, and then to the underlying problems of economics, philosophy and religion, not only because they are more urgent, but also because they are intrinsically more difficult. For many years to come, the material sciences will fascinate simple people, but those sciences no longer monopolize the attention of the most able of the younger men and women, and therefore the rate of discovery will slacken.

Within the sciences themselves there are technical limits to possible development. No working scientist has ever claimed that there is any calculable prospect of replacing coal, oil and water-power by atomic energy. The world's reserves of tidal energy and water-power are adequate to any conceivable need, but the labour involved in harnessing

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that power is itself enormous; and although there is ample room for the further mechanization of industry, there is no excuse for indulging in day-dreams of endless cheap electric light and power. Neither in the speed of transport, in the source of industrial power, nor in methods of agriculture, is there any reason to expect a dramatic change in the near future. There are thermodynamic limits to the efficiency of any type of engine; and there are limits (for example, those depending on the time of reaction) to the possibilities of chemical synthesis. We may well find that the higher compounds such as we use in foods can be made more quickly and efficiently by living plants and animals than in the chemical laboratory. The only food that is fairly easy to synthesize is alcohol, which is not wholly satisfactory as a diet.

On the industrial side, as machines become more complex, so their replacement and improvement becomes more expensive in material and labour, especially if mass-production methods are used. In the motor-car trade, it becomes increasingly expensive for manufacturers to scrap the old plant and introduce a new model every year; and in other industries the directors already employ specialized scientists, not in order to use their inventions, but to prevent other people using them. Under any system of national or international monopoly, this cold storage of inventions would become still more marked. Unless people are stimulated into a tremendous enthusiasm for novelty's sake, an industry sooner or later reaches a point beyond which the prospective return on any innovation does not justify the outlay. No-one had any doubt about the value of wireless; there were grave misgivings about television. And if inventions are patented and put aside until a radical change becomes profitable, the inventors themselves are

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likely to lose their enthusiasm and to turn their ingenuity to other ends.

Again, it is important to remember that many of the most striking modern industrial inventions do nothing whatever to save labour or to increase the world's supply of necessary goods. The steam-engine and the dynamo, like the windmill and the waterwheel, were real labour-saving devices; the total labour and material consumed in making and working the machine were less than had been used to do the machine's work by older methods. But machines like the vacuum-cleaner do little more than divert labour from one point to another—the middle-class housewife has more leisure for her amusements, but her husband has to work harder to pay the miners and electricians and artificers who have done her work for her—and there are other machines that do no necessary work at all. The camera, the gramophone, and the cinematograph, for example, are valuable inventions, but they do not belong to the same order as the bicycle, the typewriter, and the petrol-engine. They are mechanical luxuries, whose existence excites a need and an activity. To buy them we have to work harder or go without something else, and when we have bought them we have to give up to them the time our ancestors gave to painting and singing. As people slowly realize that these machines do not 'save work' but merely enable us to exchange a recreation that was an activity for an activity that is work and a recreation that is passive, there is likely to be a revulsion of feeling against the multiplication of such devices.

In the last resort, the amount of energy that we can afford to use for enjoyment depends on the amount of labour we can spare from the primary business of producing food and clothing. The great increase in the world's population and

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the proportionate improvement in the white man's standard of living during the past century were not due to mechanical invention alone; they were equally dependent on the cultivation of new land and the exertions of newly trained workers. Today there is a visible limit to the world's supply of arable land and pasturage, and unless we can find some way of growing two blades of grass in place of one without permanently impoverishing the soil, we must soon draw in our horns. The day when the settler could work one piece of land to exhaustion and then turn to another is already over; too much land has already been ruined in that way, as in the Great Dust Bowl of America, and in Australia, where hundreds of square miles have been turned to desert through too intensive sheep-farming.

How much the world's food supply can be increased by scientific farming is doubtful. Mechanization and the use of artificial manures are not unmixed blessings: they make it possible to tear bigger crops out of the soil, but they exhaust the land itself, and this exhaustion presents the agricultural scientist with problems that are not yet solved. Beyond a certain point, intensive cultivation gives rise to land erosion, plant diseases, and crops of poor food-value. To assume that laboratory science will enable us to bring about any great permanent increase in productivity is at least premature, and it may be wholly false. Nature is intensely conservative, and she has a knack of taking away with one hand what we extort from the other.

### *The Limits of Economic Progress*

It is sometimes assumed that all the difficulties that hinder any great increase in the world's supply of power and goods could be overcome by schemes for extending production on a non-economic basis. It is argued that if we did

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not expect every individual enterprise to show a profit we could make full use of the resources of science and of unemployed labour, and permanently enrich the world by undertaking immense schemes of afforestation, land-reclamation and road-making. This argument, though sound in principle, can easily give rise to exaggerated hopes. In recent times, the world's total productivity has been increasing at the rate of something like one per cent per annum: if all available resources were used, there would be a sudden spurt in production as our idle 10 per cent of labour came into action, but the rate of advance would not be permanently accelerated. To assess the possibility of each scheme within the present margin of idle power and labour, and to add the possibilities together, is fallacious. If we ignored considerations of profit we could reclaim huge areas of desert, we could double the output of potatoes, or treble the output of motor-cars, but we could not do all these things at once. The world's supply of labour and material is limited, and if we add together the quantities wanted for *all* the schemes for multiplying production, the total vastly exceeds any available reserve.

At times, the waste of labour and material in the modern world is so obvious that we are tempted to overestimate it. Ever since the economic crisis of 1931, when fruit rotted on the quay-sides, coffee was dumped into the sea, and tons of wheat were burned because it was not worth the cost of transport, people have been shamed and shocked to think that men could go hungry in one part of the world while food was thrown away elsewhere. But although the waste is enormous, it is an insignificant fraction of the world's supplies and the world's needs. The common talk about 'poverty in the midst of plenty' has only a slender foundation in fact: the poverty is real, the plenty is illusory. Here

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and there goods are wasted through inadequate distribution, just as scraps are wasted in every household, but the loss is relatively trivial, and the world remains poor not because its resources are undeveloped but because they are miserably small in comparison with the world's population. To say that the problem of production has been solved, and that only the problem of distribution remains, is a cruel distortion of the facts. For centuries to come, the struggle to increase the world's productivity will continue; and the prospect of a general age of leisure is still indefinitely remote.

Even the destructive effort of war represents a smaller waste of goods and labour than people commonly suppose. The materials of war are produced by an exceptional effort that could not be maintained indefinitely, and the increased effort is not wholly wasted. A war such as that of 1914 serves to accelerate necessary changes, to overcome obstruction and conservatism, and to lay the foundations of a new expansion and prosperity. As a means of arousing nations from lethargy, it is deplorable and horrifying; but until some equally effective method can be found, the destruction of ships and factories and the diversion of a third, or even more, of a nation's peace-time effort to the purposes of war cannot be reckoned as wholly lost. In France, during the years between 1789 and 1813, there was an unprecedented rise both in money wages and in real income, and in many countries the ultimate result of the war of 1914 was an enormous stimulus to almost every kind of industry. By 1928, the industrial production of Europe had increased to a greater extent than it would have done if the rate of progress of 1900 to 1913 had been steadily maintained.

It is obviously right and necessary that we should plan to

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avoid war and to use all our available resources; but it is important not to miscalculate the results of such planning. In this matter, the Russian example of controlled economy can easily be misleading. Before 1914, the real income per head in Russia was slowly rising; after a disastrous fall in the years following the Revolution, it moved up again, and by 1935 it had regained the level of 1914 and was still mounting rapidly. Russia, however, is still a backward country, and backward countries do not need to go through the turmoil of a *laissez-faire* economy in order to find out which processes are best and which products people like. Thanks to the experiments of other countries, they can march straight to their goal. It does not follow that a rigidly planned economy would enable the 'advanced' nations to emulate the rapid progress of backward nations that are merely taking short-cuts along a familiar road.

Indeed, even in a backward country, state-controlled planning has its dangers and its difficulties. The kind of question that confronts the directors of a planned economy is not whether a tractor factory would be useful at a certain place, but whether such a factory is preferable to all the other uses that might be made of the same labour and material. If they choose to build the factory, they cannot build a power-station or a railway or a row of houses. In the early stages of industrialization, almost any new construction is likely to be useful; but the economic problem of Russian planning will become more difficult as the system grows more productive, and already the Russians are discovering that in many matters the 'capitalist' criterion of solvency is a safer guide to the construction of a balanced and efficient system than any *a priori* consideration.

Between 1927 and 1938 the expansion of the income per head in Russia was very great indeed, but the development

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under the very different Japanese system kept pace with it, and the two remained neck-and-neck. A planned economy can avoid much of the waste inevitable in a purely competitive state, but it makes mistakes of its own and these are equally wasteful. During the first Five-Year Plan, the Russian planners assumed that bigness was identical with efficiency. A writer in *Izvestia* pointed out in 1939: 'First, it takes excessive time to build factories of this giant size. . . . Again, these industrial giants are not only complex and unwieldy, but also difficult to manage efficiently. . . . In the absence of regional production we have been forced to carry the products of a few vast undertakings all over the country. . . . We must relinquish the idea that has taken root, particularly in the minds of Soviet engineers, that small undertakings are of necessity backward. In the machine-building industry of the United States, almost all the factories are far smaller than those in the Soviet Union, yet the most efficient machines in the market are made in the United States by factories that we would consider too small for quantity production.'

In an emergency such as war, in which one obvious common need overshadows all others, state-controlled planning is necessary and efficient; and it can be equally efficient in helping backward nations to follow a familiar path. Even in the more advanced countries, national planning might well be used not only to direct industries in which the need is known and the means to serve it are ample, but also to influence the total volume of saving and investment. Economists seem to agree that in our present state of economic development a more equal distribution of spending-power, a progressive reduction in the rate of interest for safe lending, and a programme of non-productive government expenditure (whether on swimming-baths or guns) are neces-

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sary if we are to soften the impact of boom and slump, and to avoid the fierce, and now destructive, energy of capital seeking new fields for profitable investment. They point out that the loss of the interest-motive would not stop saving: a great deal of saving (whether by individuals or institutions) is a matter of setting money aside for a rainy day and in this the desire for interest is secondary. Furthermore, a limited measure of state-controlled development need not interfere with speculative investment in new and risky enterprises. The possibility of backing one's fancy in new inventions and new activities could be left open as a safeguard against bureaucratic stagnation.

But planning, especially 'non-economic' planning, is not a panacea. As a measure of social justice it is plainly right that the consumer and the worker in a staple industry should be protected from rapacious and irresponsible financiers and speculators, and that the general public should be protected from the activities of the unscrupulous advertiser. But this is a moral, rather than an economic aim, and we must not expect the public control of established industry or the national planning of new enterprise to initiate an era of unlimited prosperity and happiness. Planning can be used to mitigate obvious failures and to prevent one section of the community from taking advantage of another; but however honest and humane the planners may be, the system still leaves unsolved all the familiar problems of recognizing talent, of deciding what is good, and of estimating and adjusting contradictory demands. A planned economy must rest, like any other, on the general approval of the public and on the zeal and enterprise of those who are most closely concerned with each industry. The replacement of the profit motive by a passion for public service would be a moral gain, but to replace the profit motive by parliamen-

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tary control backed by threats of imprisonment or 'liquidation' is in general neither a moral advance nor a step towards greater industrial efficiency.<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt that public control of industry will be stronger in the future than it has been in the past, and that industries in which the demand is known and constant, and does not compete with any other demand, will pass under the control of boards responsible not to a body of shareholders but to the workers and the general public. Changes of this kind are inevitable in the present temper of democracy; and there is no reason to suppose that they will involve a period of revolutionary violence. From the Reform Bill of 1832 down to Roosevelt's New Deal, it has been proved time after time that the wealthy will accept restrictions of their power rather than risk their whole position. The rich need social stability quite as much as the poor, and their power of obstruction grows less from year to year.<sup>1</sup> The free movement of capital, as the nineteenth century understood it, has already been modified beyond all recognition, and it is still changing. But it is important to remember that changes of this kind will not lead to any miraculous increase in production: they are, indeed, nothing more than the steps that we must take if the present rate of progress is to be maintained.

### *International Affairs*

Just as the vision of universal plenty is illusory, so too is the vision of perpetual harmony and peace. It is idle for people who enjoy great possessions and great prestige to imagine that, because they would like peace, they will be left in peace. The price of security is effort, and we can

<sup>1</sup> The share of capital in the British national income dwindled from 45 per cent in 1911 to 33 per cent in 1929. It will be even less at the end of the present war.

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choose whether our main effort shall be to retain possessions by force or to make ourselves indispensable to the world through our energy, our inventiveness, and our cultivation of the higher values; but we delude ourselves if we believe that spiritual dignity can preserve us without the help of material strength.

Genuine peace can only come through community of interest and compatibility of outlook; and as long as some nations are prosperous and others poor, as long as differences remain in national ideals and codes of honour, and as long as some nations are expanding and others are stationary, these conditions are not likely to be attained. A nation that has won a defensive war may forget that its barren sacrifice enabled it to preserve something of its own prosperity and culture; it may be firmly convinced of the advantages of peace, and may be willing to make some sacrifice in the cause of peace. But to a backward or a beaten nation, the advantages of peace are less spectacular than the prizes war appears to offer.

In 1938, the citizens of Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States enjoyed a higher real income per head than any other nation in the world, whereas Russia, Italy and Japan, in spite of their heroic efforts, had not reached the level passed by Britain in 1860. Nations as prosperous and pacific as the United States and Britain are always likely to be convinced of their own moral and intellectual superiority. They will assert that their prosperity is due to the energy, acumen, and high moral standards of themselves and their ancestors, and they will argue that this superiority carries with it the right to a little more leisure and comfort than other people enjoy. Such an argument is not likely to impress their poor but struggling fellow-nations. If those nations are really backward,

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intellectually and morally, the argument will appear to them to be nothing more than a confession of flabbiness and greed; and if they are not, the argument is itself false and unjust, and the lesser nations may well think that a permanent injustice is worse than the temporary evil of war.

General disarmament is an ideal that commends itself to prosperous and highly civilized powers: it will not become universal unless those nations can effectively demonstrate that their reluctance to fight is not the outcome of mere laziness and incapacity. As long as they are not weakened by subversive movements, and as long as their prosperity and population do not decline, the British Empire and the United States will have the power to preserve their ideals in the face of scepticism and hostility. But the price is high: it would demand constant vigilance; and a federation to preserve the world's peace would involve definite, concrete commitments in return for problematical advantages. To be effective the agreement would have to be binding, with prohibitive penalties for any attempt to contract out, for as the experience of the United States shows, a federation cannot allow the right of secession. Each of the contracting nations would have to place the greater part of its armed forces under an international commission in which it might easily be outvoted. Whatever our more naive reformers may try to believe, the ideals and aims of Mexicans, Japanese and Spaniards are not always compatible with those of British and American progressives; and democratic federation does not immediately solve these problems of conflicting interest and aspirations. Democratic union with England did not save Ireland from poverty and civil war, nor has it saved the Scottish Highlands from desolation and depopulation: majorities are not always just and

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generous, and they use indifference and complacency instead of bombs and guns when they wage a war of extermination.

But in spite of the risks and the certain cost, federation, either tacit or explicit, and a corresponding sacrifice of sovereignty, are imperative if we are to use the world's resources to the fullest extent. There is a real, though limited, community of interest, and perhaps in the near future that community of interest can be made obvious to the taxpayer and the conscript in Western Europe and the United States. But effective federation cannot be accomplished by voting for it, and the appeal to common interest is itself a doubtful basis unless that interest is of a kind that will arouse sincere and passionate enthusiasm. We have to remember that although the usages of war, like the traditions of diplomacy and the rules of international law, are firmly based on a community of interest, they have from time to time been rejected by nations who believed them to be no more than out-worn devices intended to protect the lazy, the foolish, and the decrepit. We must recognize the possibility of such rebellions in the future, and remember that a federation based on a low order of common interest, or on common interests only dimly apprehended, is only another name for the old offensive and defensive alliance.

Federations are made effective not by legislation but by mutual confidence. The partners must have such complete confidence in each other that they are prepared to abolish tariff barriers and to make themselves vulnerable by allowing industries to go wherever they can best be served. To maintain that confidence it would be necessary to work for a real community of culture and outlook: local customs, traditions and aspirations might be tolerated, but only with-

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in the limits imposed by something equivalent to a common religion. Mutual confidence depends in the last resort on a common purpose supported by the strong self-sacrificing energy that comes from an intense belief in the justice of the common cause. Unless a federation has an exuberant self-confidence that is almost aggressive, and unless the great majority of its citizens have a profound sense of mission, it will either collapse from within or succumb to an external enemy.

This is a hard conclusion, and the liberal pacifist who hopes for a cheap and easy-going peace is likely to denounce it as immoral. But it is, on the contrary, the only moral conclusion. Western Europe and America have before them two possibilities: they can either become the intellectual and moral leaders of the world and make their own material advantage a secondary consideration, or they can aim exclusively at raising their own standard of living and shortening their own hours of work. If they choose the first course, they will at least avoid the self-indulgent laziness that threatens them from within. If they choose the second (and perhaps even if they choose the first) they must be prepared to face the rebellion of backward and jealous nations. In neither case will their own material advantage be great. The energy and natural resources of America, the political wisdom and commercial honesty of the British, the culture and intellectual ferment of the French, are talents that cannot be used for purely selfish ends; they have brought great advantages, but these advantages can only be preserved by accepting the responsibility implied in any talent.

### *A Relatively Stable Society*

Neither in economic nor in international affairs is there

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reason to expect the immediate arrival of the millenium. We must not expect too much from science or from a more equal and effective distribution of the world's goods, nor must we expect that either wars or federations will settle once and for all the clash of conflicting interest, outlook and temperament. In many ways, we must be content to see the backward nations drawing level; and we can avoid their enmity only if we offer them our active help. The increase in population and material wealth will spread to other parts of the world; with it there will go the upheaval of belief and social habit which the older industrial countries have already experienced; and meanwhile the society of North America and Western Europe is likely to be relatively stable, both in numbers and in way of life.

By a stable community we mean one in which the main material needs are not subject to great or erratic fluctuations, and in which the rate of material progress is steady. Such a society would be free from the painful upheavals of social life that have been caused by immense and repeated changes in the kind of goods that are wanted and the kind of labour needed to produce them; but there is no reason why it should be moribund or stagnant. Ingenuity and enterprise do not inevitably express themselves in innovations that compel millions of workers to change their occupation every few years. Intense financial competition and rapid transformations of industry are not the only ways in which the vitality and health of a community can find an outlet, nor are they necessarily the best.

We are sometimes told that much of the industrial activity of the future will be non-economic; that is to say, that it will not be governed by considerations of profit. In a certain sense, and within limits, this is likely to be true; but it does not mean that we must initiate extravagant material enter-

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prises and sell our goods at 'non-economic' prices. As the backward countries develop their own industries, it will become more and more difficult to sell them products that they can make at home. There is no very great hope for the future in any attempt to cajole or bully the primary producer in Africa, Australia, South America, and South-Eastern Europe, either through the older mechanism of international loans or by the newer method of subsidized exports. If 'non-economic' activity means pressing on more and more desperately along the old lines and trying to force industrial products down the throats of reluctant consumers, it can only result in bitterness and war.

Nor does the situation demand that the industrialized countries should again become predominantly agricultural. That good land should be wasted is obviously foolish, and if in order to conserve their soil the newer countries abandon large-scale mono-culture farming in favour of mixed subsistence farming it will be necessary for the older countries to devote more attention to preserving and improving their own agriculture. But it would be no less foolish to waste the special talents and resources of the industrialized countries ; and if some industrial countries were to make a wholehearted return to agriculture they would merely make themselves the serfs of others that did not. At this point, it is worth noticing that the familiar moral argument in favour of an agricultural community, rather than one that makes a greater use of mechanized industry, itself rests on a false comparison. When social critics contrast the quick, perky artfulness of the industrial worker with the slow, organic wisdom of the farmer and the farm-labourer, and point out that the first is fundamentally shallow, irresponsible and suicidal, they are comparing the outlook that belongs to a settled and stable agricultural community with that of an

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industrial community in a state of active change. The conditions of the nineteenth century, and of the early part of this century, were not the normal conditions of an industrial civilization; they represented a transition stage in which intense competition, social fluidity, and general scepticism, were assets. In a transitional society, constantly facing new inventions, new ways of life, and new competitors, there is little place for co-operation, generosity and social responsibility. In a more settled society, whether industrial or agricultural, it becomes possible to regain the habit of thinking in terms of years, not months or days, and to renew the old respect for the dignity of work, for healthy active pleasures and for the claims of family life.<sup>1</sup>

When we say that a considerable part of the activity of the future will be non-economic we do not mean that we must revert to primitive and wasteful methods of supplying human needs. There need be no regression to the past: our gains are permanent if we choose to make them so. But many of the preconceptions of a transitional period are inappropriate to a stable society; and whether we regret the change or welcome it, they will be discarded as the new conditions force stability upon us. If in some ways the new outlook resembles that of earlier stages, it will do so not because it represents a return to medievalism, but because it represents a new stability. The medieval conception of 'the just price' is a conservative and stabilizing influence to which a growing or a changing industry cannot wisely be submitted, but in an industry in which great changes are

<sup>1</sup> The absurdity of any claim that the mere handling of machinery invariably produces selfishness and irresponsibility is seen if we turn to a 'mechanical' job that has already been stabilized. The problems and methods of marine engineering have not changed greatly in the past forty years, and on the whole the outlook of the traditional Scots engineer is preferable to that of any community of peasants, serfs, or fellahin, even on moral grounds.

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neither likely nor desirable, there is no longer the old need for intense competition, and principles of justice and social efficiency begin to assert themselves. It is in this strictly limited sense that some part of the industry of the future will be 'non-economic'.

There is, however, a second and more profound sense in which a society that has stabilized its primary industries must turn to non-economic activity if it is to escape stagnation. Some of its energy must be directed to activities that seem, at first sight, to be as 'useless' and disinterested as the activities of religion, art, and the early stages of any science. The foundation of every great expansion has always been the disinterested zeal of the explorer: it was not the hope of gain that led Hudson through the cracking ice into Hudson Bay or drove Livingstone across Africa; the pursuit of profit was not the incentive that dominated Captain Cook and inspired Newton, Franklin and Clerk Maxwell with their passion for discovery. Only when a movement is well established and when people have been taught to appreciate its products does it become an 'economic' movement and fall into the hands of the Marconis and the Edisons, and finally the Nuffields and the Henry Fords. Altruism, enterprise, resource and courage are the only sure foundations of a nation's greatness, and a nation that has no use for these 'unprofitable' virtues cannot long maintain its supremacy even in a strictly economic field.

The industrial countries cannot expect their populations to expand indefinitely while other countries feed them; but they have other assets besides their industrial skill and natural resources. A high standard of culture, a willingness to keep the peace, and the qualities of the honest broker, do not explicitly appear in any economic balance-sheet; and they must inevitably be based on personal generosity and

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unselfishness. But, to a nation as a whole, their material value is none the less real, and in the long run they yield a dividend. Even in the period of transition, when the profits of commercial and industrial enterprise were largest and most obvious, the activities depending on a deliberate rejection of personal gain were never wholly neglected; they will be still more important in the future.

There is a real danger that communities which approach the limit of industrial development may fall into lethargy or decay; because enterprise in the old direction is no longer profitable, they may cease to make any effort at all. But there is no compelling reason why this should be so. If they choose to seize their opportunity they can impose on themselves fresh burdens and fresh responsibilities, they can accept a new standard of attainment and find a new significance in life. Already the United States and the countries of the British Empire are near to the critical point at which they must make the decision. They will delay it as they have delayed other decisions, to the last possible moment. As far as the material conditions go, they are favourable to a great renewal of vitality and zest, and in the near future the material conditions themselves are likely to force us to abandon the illusions and false ideals that are responsible for much of our confusion today.

## *Chapter 14*

### THE DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY

#### *The Legacy of Industrial Evolution*

The ills of our society, whether in Western Europe or America, are deep, but the malady is not something that must run an inevitable and fatal course, nor is it something inseparable from the forms of political democracy. The end of colonial expansion, the stabilization of industrial advance, and the corresponding halt in the growth of population, are not in themselves signs of decadence; and the diverse failures of democracy in Italy, Germany and Spain, and a dozen other countries, point to nothing more than a lack of realism in the democratic outlook, a pathetic belief that the advantages of political freedom could be enjoyed without constant watchfulness, constant exertion, and constant sacrifice. The loss of confidence in the values of our civilization derives far more from errors in our way of thought than from any material cause; and many of these errors are only what one might expect towards the end of a period of rapid scientific development, of transition from oligarchy to democracy, and from relative poverty to relative prosperity; and they are not beyond our power to correct.

In considering the liberal and democratic outlook of the

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transition period, however, there are three separate features to distinguish. First, there are the liberal ideals of responsible self-government, freedom of thought, and equality before the law, which are right and valuable, though they do not form the whole of a balanced and energetic outlook. Secondly, there are the optimistic and 'progressive' ideas that have proved to be illusory. Thirdly, there are historical developments, such as the decay of the landowning classes and the growth of specialized industry, that have been brought about partly through technical changes and partly through 'progressive' ideas, but would be irreversible even if the ideas associated with them were abandoned.

The belief that man was naturally good, that universal prosperity was just round the corner, that rebellion was always right and tradition always wrong, and that the voice of the majority was the voice of truth and justice—all these notions were useful in the period of transition; and in a period of rapid material progress it was natural to associate an optimistic outlook with enlightened understanding and liberal ideals. But some of these ideas were never wholly true, and are now no longer useful. Even where democracy has managed to survive, the belief that the individual could attain a durable happiness by aiming at 'self-fulfilment' in a narrow sense, that the greatest happiness of the greatest number could provide an adequate motive force for the life of a community or a nation, and that the keen pursuit of material science could achieve this aim, has failed in practice. The 'enlightened self-interest' of the nineteenth century has developed into a more disheartening and more strictly selfish outlook, and this outlook has in turn served a useful purpose in adjusting the rise of population to a slower rate of industrial advance, but is now in danger of persisting long after the need for it has passed.

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Today we need to scrutinize the notions that have become entangled with the ideals of freedom, progress and democracy as carefully as our predecessors scrutinized the accepted beliefs of their time. We need not only to defend our democratic rights against the encroachments of dictators, but also to guard against specious doctrines that arise only from a mistaken application of scientific method, and lead in practice to inertia, indifference, and the loss of social vitality. Such a programme is the natural and necessary extension of the great liberal and humanistic movements of the past: it has nothing in common with the aims of those who would like to discredit all generous social aims in order to reverse the course of history. The decay of the landed aristocracy, the incipient decay of the financier class, the disappearance of the all-round craftsman and his replacement by the specialized technician, together with the resulting incursion of the special sciences into general education, all these are changes that could not be reversed without a drastic reduction in the world's population. Our problem is to make the most of their advantages, to mitigate the evils they entail, and to ensure that the whole process is carried out in a way that will add not only to the comfort and security of human life, but also to its dignity and value.

In so doing, there is no need to rush into a complete reversal of utopian ideas. Truth is not discovered by turning error upside down; and there is no virtue in replacing theories that were flattering but false by others that are perversely puritanical and pessimistic. It will be possible to relax the pressure of scientific research without abandoning any knowledge or device, and without relinquishing the prospect of further advance. The growth of population may slow down in the advanced and relatively stable countries,

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but there is no reason to expect it to decline unless we struggle to maintain unduly self-indulgent and deceptive notions in the face of all the facts. Universal peace and prosperity may still be a long way off, and to aim directly at them may not be the best way of attaining them, but the continuation of our own privileged existence depends on our capacity to make ourselves the indispensable leaders in such a movement.

### *Utopianism, Pacifism and Political Realism*

More than any other single cause, it is the unhappy jumble of optimistic hopes (based on the hard-earned progress of the nineteenth century) and altruistic aims (backed by nothing more than a belief in social convenience and the right to personal happiness) that is responsible for our frustration and bewilderment today. In practice, the ideal of corporate selfishness proves to be unfitted to achieve its ends, or likely to achieve them only at the price of an unforeseen degeneration; and the liberal ideals of peace, security and freedom are far less likely to be achieved by a society which aims at them for their own sake than by one that sets a high valuation on courage, truthfulness, and kindness, and treats the citizen's duty to the State as the incidental outcome of his duty to God.

Often, the most dangerous enemy of social progress is not the reactionary, whose perversity and prejudice are obvious, but the doctrinaire progressive who refuses to recognize the real difficulties of his problem and creates for himself and his followers illusions that are bound to lead to disappointment or disaster. The belief, for example, that peace can be attained merely by refusing to fight may give the individual a sense of personal satisfaction and superiority, but it does very little to remove the causes of violence

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and war : a passive ‘no more war’ movement on the part of wealthy and satisfied nations is not only an invitation to war, but also a rejection of the responsibility to protect the weak.

On this point, the morality of nations must differ fundamentally from that of individuals. The individual is commonly a member of a community ; among his fellow-members there are many who share his aims and his ideals, and whom he recognizes as his equals, so that an outlook does not perish even if it costs some of its believers their lives. For that reason the individual is sometimes rightly willing to sacrifice his interests, and even his life, for the common good. Among nations, there is no fully-integrated community and very little that can be called a common measure of value. ‘The world community’ exists only in so far as people recognize it and express that recognition through their national life : and it cannot become a reality without a profound change in national loyalty and patriotism. The dissolution of the nation is not a step towards a world community unless it is general and goes hand-in-hand with the extension of a common morality and a common conception of the purpose of life ; and the real difficulty of international affairs is that only a few nations recognize a commonwealth of nations, and those only at irregular intervals and on the unjustified assumption that other nations will respect the same code of international conduct. It may well be that such nations at such times are behaving morally ; but if they allow themselves to be defeated, or if they carry their respect for other people’s ideas and ideals to such a point that they are unwilling to defend their own, they do nothing to further the aim they have in mind.

To argue, therefore, that a progressive nation must remain on the alert, and must keep in reserve a force not

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much less than that of possible challengers, is not inconsistent with maintaining that among individuals 'authority' can be, and should be, largely independent of force. We can take a 'realist' view of international affairs without subscribing to the false realism which asserts that might is right. The measure of our international morality is not our unwillingness to answer force with force, but our willingness to make sacrifices for what we ourselves conceive to be the common good, to turn the lower forms of authority to the support of the higher, and to judge the higher by something other than our convenience or its own brute strength.

Here again we meet a fundamental difficulty: it is precisely in the most prosperous and secure communities—those that have most energy to spare for just and generous action abroad—that social criticism is most vocal and that citizens are most keenly aware of the deficiencies of their community as a whole. The utopian reformer is often so confident that people in other countries would accept his aims if only he could explain them, and so conscious of the meanness and injustice of his own community, that he refuses to fight except for some great cause that would reform the world. Yet no great struggle is ever simple, and no great cause is ever uncontaminated. Political forces are never active in the pursuit of remote and moral aims unless immediate and material aims are also involved. But that does not alter the fact that some aims are better than others, that some political policies are moral and some are not, that some constitutions demand a high standard of citizenship while others are degrading.

Democracy, now and in the future, can survive only if its citizens are willing to defend the whole social fabric within which it exists and to preserve the condition that allows

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them to carry on their own struggle on their own terms. There is no need to force democracy on other people—it is a form of government that calls for peculiar talents, and those talents are not equally enjoyed by all nations nor are they wholly essential to a high degree of civilization—and there is no need to persecute the temperamental pacifist, even if, like Gandhi, he uses his immunity to indulge in moral bullying. But it is important to recognize that there is no inevitable evolution towards democratic government, that its existence depends on continuous effort, and that it can be betrayed through the mistaken ideas of its supporters as easily as through the machinations of conspirators with a lust for power.

### *The Future of Democracy*

Today, the urgent problem is no longer that of achieving democracy, but of maintaining what has already been achieved; and the high demand that a democracy makes on its citizens is at once its justification and its weakness. If the masses use their power ignorantly and selfishly, if they take away the privileges of an aristocracy or plutocracy without assuming the responsibilities that went with them, their State must collapse. If they leave the pursuit of truth, virtue and beauty to a class whom they no longer respect and whose material power they are whittling away, then they attach the fortunes of their whole community to those of the class they are destroying. The advantages of any form of freedom cannot be long enjoyed unless responsibility itself is accepted as one of the advantages; and rights cannot be indefinitely maintained unless they go hand in hand with the corresponding obligations.

But if the object of the State is not merely to enable its citizens to live, but to enable them to live well, the State

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itself must rest on something more than mutual respect for rights. It must be a voluntary association to develop the talents and virtues of its citizens, and such an association cannot be effective unless people are willing to make use of the example and advice of their betters. Men are unequal in their talents, and if we are to make the best use of our resources, leadership in some form or other is inevitable. But it need not be, and should not be, the leadership of a special race or class, and there is no reason why it should rest on the personal force of a domineering personality. We all have the capacity to distinguish between one kind of authority and another, and to recognize talents and qualities of character superior to our own. If we choose to make greater use of this capacity in public affairs we could help to preserve our society from complacent and suicidal lethargy.

Prosperity breeds inertia and indifference rather than alertness and adaptability ; but although the democratic system is no safeguard against laziness, self-indulgence and short-sightedness, it does not follow that a prosperous democracy must inevitably decay. For nations, as for individuals, it is possible to resist the pressure of circumstances, and to preserve, even in prosperity, a spirit of public service and a proper respect for the dignity of work and thought. The temptation to lead the life of a comfortable slug is strong, but the lesson that has sometimes been learnt by prosperous families in the past could be learnt by a whole nation : they could force themselves to realize that a talent becomes a nuisance unless it is exercised, and that life has no value or significance except in so far as we recognize that some activities are better than others, and that some causes are more valuable than life and comfort.

The great difficulty about reforming, or even preserving,

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any State in which the sovereign power is vested in the people is that very little can be done through reforms imposed from above. It is almost useless to propose specific legislative measures when the character of the State depends directly on the character of the people. But although the character of a people cannot be changed by Act of Parliament, there are, nevertheless, one or two limited practical reforms that might go some distance towards mending the weaknesses of our present democracies. We could increase our real freedom of expression and loosen the rheumatic joints of a democratic constitution by diminishing the power of the party machines, which not only put a premium on dullness and conformity, but also deepen and perpetuate the lines of demarcation left by the quarrels of the past. We could make money more respectable by limiting the purposes for which it can be used, and by altering the ways in which a fortune can be made. By refraining from giving public honours to successful rogues, and by a little discriminating taxation, we could give expression to the changing needs of our time; and incidentally we could encourage those journalists who persist in believing that their function is not merely to purvey entertainment, but to preserve a sense of value and proportion, and to provide reliable news and accurate information, however 'boring' or unpalatable.

In one sense, even such trivial reforms as these are 'undemocratic', for they rest on the assumption that some things are better than others, and that popular approval, whether measured by big sales or by the ballot-box, does not always correspond to merit. But this assumption, although it is foreign to commercialism and to a strictly egalitarian democracy, is nevertheless one that most people still at times believe and act upon. It is as deeply rooted in the humanistic politics of Aristotle as it is in Christian

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sociology, and it is a necessary complement to the ideals of democratic liberalism.

The difficulty of our present situation is that our democracy is dominated by the outlook of the lower middle classes, who have achieved comfort without accepting responsibility, and have not yet learned that moral and intellectual authority are as real as the authority of money. If they can be convinced that prosperity and power cannot be retained without accepting serious obligations, if they can get rid of their unduly optimistic notions, and if they bring themselves to realize that the duties of a citizen do not end when he has provided himself and his family with a home and a motor-car, and voted for a candidate with the right buttonhole, then democracy can survive. If, on the other hand, they insist on claiming their rights whilst leaving the responsibilities of science, politics and art to a non-existent or unrecognized minority, then democracy will collapse, no matter how vigorously it is defended against external enemies, and it will be replaced by a new 'aristocracy' based on a crude authority that even the most stupid and irresponsible citizen will be compelled to recognize.

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The prospect of such a collapse is gloomy in the extreme, for it could scarcely be peaceful. A country that is *almost* capable of democracy is not likely to succumb without a violent and destructive struggle; and the poor but energetic neighbours of a wealthy country which is lacking in energy, enterprise, and unselfish devotion to the common cause and common ideals, are scarcely likely to leave it to die in peace. Faced with such a prospect, it is more than likely that people will consent to some measure of superimposed planning, and some limitation of their democratic rights,

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rather than make the effort to achieve a free and responsible democracy.

In the near future, a certain amount of co-operative planning will be inevitable; but rigid state-control is not a virtue in itself, and schemes for bringing industry under the direct control of the electorate deserve to be scrutinized with care. Under centralized control it is not only the capitalist and the *entrepreneur* who lose some of their specific freedom, but also the workman and the consumer. We have to remember not only that excessive centralization makes industry more fragile and inflexible, and that it lessens the scope and interest of the individual worker, but also that in the cheapening of industrial products specialization has played a far more important part than unified control. Unless there is some very powerful incentive activating every worker, as there is in time of war, large organizations are apt to be torpid and inefficient as well as inhumane. There is a far from negligible danger that in the coming changes the zeal of amateur planners will force cast-iron systems upon us that will be incapable of development and growth and will tend to produce unenterprising and irresponsible mass-made citizens.

Planning, however, need not have this demoralizing and fossilizing influence; and when plans are discussed, it is well worth while to bear in mind the curious structure of free education in England. The law of England imposes on the parent the duty of ensuring that his child shall receive efficient instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic; but it does not require attendance at school. Anyone can open a school, as long as the actual buildings comply with local regulations; the Board of Education does not provide schools and does not employ teachers, nor does it prescribe curricula; the Board's inspectors have no power to issue

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orders either to a teacher or to a local authority. Only as a last resort, and after prolonged criticism, is a school likely to be reported as inefficient and debarred from receiving public funds; and although the State heavily subsidizes the universities it does not interfere in their internal affairs. This combination of state-control and individual responsibility allows a maximum of flexibility and individuality; it preserves variety and encourages the service of local and specialized needs; and although its financial structure is thoroughly non-commercial, it cannot be said to be wasteful.

Such a system is not usually the ideal of those who indulge in speculative planning. In their anxiety to provide for every contingency and to guard against every possible abuse they aim at the maximum of central control, not the minimum. They assume that the ordinary man cannot be trusted to show common sense, common honesty, and common initiative; they aim at giving to some committee of experts, not the power of persuasion that rightly belongs to them, but the arbitrary power of law; and their methods no less than their aims are dictatorial. Whether they call themselves Communist, Fascist, or Christian, they distrust their own capacity to demonstrate by argument the soundness of their views; and they hope that by imposing their system by force it will come to be accepted through sheer habit and inertia: 'The most complete success of a revolution in men's outlook will be ensured when the new outlook has been taught to practically the whole population, and, if necessary, afterwards forced upon them, whilst the organizers of the idea, that is to say the movement, need only include as many individuals as are indispensable for the occupation of the nerve centres of the country in question.'

The words are those of Adolf Hitler, but they might

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equally well be those of some of our own social reformers, and they rest on a profound misunderstanding of the nature of man and the nature of authority. The ordinary man is fallible, but so is the leader. If the judgements of a single leader or of a chosen aristocracy are given the force of law, they may establish a State that will have advantages in comparison with a parliamentary democracy; but sooner or later a point will arise on which the leader or ruling class is wrong and an ordinary man is right. If force, even the quiet, sober force of a wholly planned society, has replaced reason and consent in the government of the State, the difference will grow into a grievance; and it is likely to grow quickly, for there are always a few people who react against anything they are taught and are keener in using their wits against the authority of age or force than in trying to understand its justification. Dictatorships and bureaucracies are fallible, and because they are artificially preserved from the need to admit their errors, they are brittle. They replace the authority of reason and persuasion by force, and thereby compel their opponents to do the same.

It sometimes happens that Christian sociologists, faced with the corruption and confusion of the modern world, develop a passion for 'planning' no less extravagant than that of Hitler, Wells and Stalin. Their aim is to short-circuit the long and tiresome process of democratic reform, and to give the moral precepts of Christianity the force of law without waiting for the consent of the majority. They forget that social principles cannot be rightly or safely imposed upon the State unless they reach the governing powers through the whole mass of the people. If Christianity has enough intellectual dignity, and if theologians and Christian sociologists recognize their duty to convince the whole people, the Christian State might yet become practical poli-

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tics. But the alternative—the Christianized State imposed on a pagan population by a minority, or the State identified with the Church—is a counsel of desperation, and it would corrupt Christianity as well as the State.

### *Education for Democracy*

To judge from our previous history, we are likely to achieve a compromise in which the present mixture of aristocracy, financial oligarchy and democracy is diluted with bureaucracy and partial dictatorship ‘for the period of the crisis’; and the proportions of that mixture will depend on the extent to which we equip ourselves for democracy. It is useless to defend the rights of the people unless the people have the determination and the ability to fulfil their civil duties. A nation whose citizens prefer not to be told the truth, and habitually leave every form of responsibility to someone else, cannot long remain a democracy; and the extent to which the dictatorship of force must be used in public affairs depends on the extent to which other forms of authority are recognized and accepted.

In the past, the Public Boarding Schools in England, and their equivalent in America, have trained a special class for the responsible duties of the State. They have provided the country not only with its executive officers and its statesmen, clergy, philosophers and poets, but also with a responsible and discriminating audience capable of distinguishing between fact and fancy, duty and inclination, culture and amusement. Today that class is losing its wealth and power, and as it loses its power so it abandons its public spirit and becomes lethargic, self-seeking and self-deceiving. To replace or supplement the Public Schools we need schools that will do for the lower middle class all that Arnold’s Rugby did for the class that gained power in the

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nineteenth century. We need to train not merely competent tradesmen, clerks, and mechanics, but responsible citizens.

In England, the problem presented by the movement towards equality of incomes and by the corresponding decline of the lesser Public Schools is already urgent. It seems likely that for a long time to come the great historic Public Schools will continue to serve a useful purpose and to adapt themselves to changing needs ; but the lesser schools—the institutions that were local grammar schools until a century ago and hastily transformed themselves to the Rugby pattern—have already lost their prestige and their sense of mission. They are losing their pupils, they have no clear perception of their function in a changing world, and they seem likely to resist with bull-headed determination any attempt to reintegrate them in the nation's social and intellectual life. Perhaps the best plan would be to allow most of the minor Public Schools to revert to their original position as local grammar schools, and to foster the large secondary day schools so that they become an active centre of local life, a source of inspiration and guidance to other schools in their neighbourhood. This course has the advantage that it builds on an existing and lively tradition, and preserves, or rather restores, the *local* character of education ; whereas the alternative plan, of sending large numbers of scholarship winners to the bankrupt boarding schools, would infect the newcomers with the outlook of a declining class, impoverish local life still further, and do nothing to offer the ordinary schools the leadership they need.

The problem, however, is not merely one of organizing the higher stages of education ; our whole conception of education and of the right to education needs to be revised. At present we offer intellectual training to all children of marked ability, but the scope of that training is limited, and

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it does very little to counteract the impression that a man's main business in life is to make money for himself. At the end of their training we then allow them to discover that they are barred (unofficially but none the less effectively) from most of the higher professions and most of the positions of trust in the public services. Fundamntally, it is not snobbery or prejudice that stands in their way; it is not even the preliminary expense, though poverty is still a notable handicap to a career in law, diplomacy, literature, or the fighting services; the real impediment is the inadequacy of their own training. By giving them a highly sophisticated—and predominantly scientific—education without a corresponding moral and social training, we equip them for acute and penetrating criticism without helping them to build up a character suited to the responsibilities of leadership. In this way we turn some of our best potential citizens into malcontents, whose criticism is acute but irresponsible, and whose dissatisfaction is based not on any clear perception of social evils, but on a personal grievance.

Broadly speaking, the aim of public education should be to give the pupil enough understanding of fact to be a useful worker, enough morality and social sense to enable him to use his understanding for good rather than evil, and enough sense of religion and beauty to feel that the effort is worth while. In a society using the methods of modern industry, it is plain that a great deal of time and attention must be devoted to purely technical instruction in the sciences. It is equally plain that the time we spend in making a boy proficient as an artisan or mechanic does nothing to further two of the necessary aims of education, and does nothing to build a genuinely national culture. On the contrary, it has tended in the past to undermine any firm moral conviction and any firm sense of value, and to give the im-

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pression that ‘culture’ is a perquisite of the rich, and a rather silly perquisite. The state-provided schools are secular, philistine and vaguely hedonistic. The teachers themselves have had very little education (in England, they spend two years in a training college before they begin their life’s work, and in that time they have to learn how to teach as well as what to teach), and they are afraid of offending the susceptibilities of the parents. Consequently they pay very little direct attention to moral training or the appreciation of the arts, and where religious instruction is introduced they tend to play for safety by reducing it to matter of fact (“St Luke says . . . whereas St Mark . . .”), and teaching it like any other examination subject.

The resulting education is hopelessly unbalanced and inadequate, and to increase its quantity without altering its quality would only aggravate the evil. No good purpose is served by admitting a general right to education and to equality of opportunity if that education is merely a means to a narrow and selfish end, and if the equal opportunity is interpreted as an opportunity to indulge in anti-social competition. It is useless to try to remove the spirit of competition in industry, where that spirit is redundant, if at the same time we continue to produce citizens whose outlook is essentially competitive and individualistic. The claim for equality of opportunity has no moral basis unless it is a claim to put one’s talents at the common service.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is more than doubtful whether the interests of a community as a whole are well served by setting every citizen to the most difficult and responsible trade or profession compatible with his talents and his education. There is a great deal to be said for having a few butchers, shoemakers and farm-labourers whose intelligence and knowledge are superior to their occupation. They act as a leaven in society, they prevent the formation of a narrow class mentality, and their existence is the only safeguard against the unbearable snobbery and the crushing sense of inferiority that would arise in any society in which a man’s trade was almost the exact reflection of his moral and intellectual worth.

## RELIGION IN EDUCATION

In any reform of education, the main responsibility falls on the teachers and the universities: they cannot wait for leadership from above without unconsciously taking a step towards the bureaucratic state. In a society that is changing without any clear conception of its aim, it falls to the teachers not merely to train individuals to fit into an existing niche in trade or industry, but also to determine the nature of society itself, to decide what type of man society is to honour and respect, and what kind of motive is to dominate the common citizen. Whether they consciously accept the responsibility makes no difference: the power is in their hands, and if they ignore it they are none the less making a decision. If they accept responsibility for the moral and civic education of their pupils, they must go beyond the bounds of strict vocational training; and they will find that they cannot stop short at the inculcation of scientific facts and moral precepts.

### *Religion in Education*

Any vital development of education must involve an intrusion into fields that are often considered personal and controversial. The studies that are safest—those that are most nearly impersonal and objective—are not those that reveal significance and value; they are, on the contrary, those that interpret the higher in terms of the lower, and sometimes tempt the unwary to deny the existence of the higher altogether. Unless they are counterbalanced by a very different training they become, in the long run, a menace not only to the happiness and dignity of the individual, but also to the well-being of the State; and for that reason education in religion is no less a matter of public concern than education in arithmetic and science. Specialized instruction is the responsibility of the churches,

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and of parents and writers; but the State in its own interest needs to see that public education does not remain, as it is, fundamentally anti-religious.

In comparison with our scientific education, our spiritual education is rudimentary, and our neglect of religious teaching has encouraged the growth of every kind of heresy and false doctrine. Sooner or later, mistaken doctrine about the nature of man and his aspirations will destroy itself as surely as false doctrine about chemistry; indeed, the experiments have been made many times already and the lessons written down; but our own generation have been very largely ignorant of those records and have tried to start again from the beginning. Knowing nothing of Christian philosophy they assumed that there was nothing to know: if Origen or Kierkegaard were mentioned they fell back on the argument that modern science had in some way changed all that. The strongest of them remained stern, narrow rationalists, with a childish metaphysics and a puritanical conscience. The weaker lapsed into exotic, egregious or inadequate religions.

Today, the danger is more serious than ever. The disregard of religion and of traditional morality has brought unforeseen difficulties, and in the face of those difficulties people will look for a new morality and a new religion. In that search they will be serious and earnest; it is important that they should not be ignorant. For a time, sham religions and debased emotional versions of Christianity will be popular. In the absence of any competent criticism, people will turn to home-made religions that act not as a complement to our scientific knowledge and a spur to action, but as a consolation and a sedative. To counteract their debilitating effect, and the no less devitalizing influence of a strict materialism, we need teachers whose

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knowledge of their special subjects is set against a wider understanding of the nature of humanity and human needs, and who know that religion can be discussed on the same intellectual level as physics and trigonometry.

To ask for religious education in this sense is less ambitious than it sounds, and it need not run counter to our prejudice against sectarian teaching. We are not asking that all teachers should be Christians, but merely that they should understand in a general way the realities that underlie religion, and know that in religion, as in science, authorities exist whose credentials are open to inspection. There is no need to forbid a child to become a Theosophist or a Holy Roller or a Christian Scientist, just as there is no need to forbid him to become a Flat-earther or a Phlogistonist; but he ought to know that opinions in these matters are not completely free and equal, and that if he wants to argue he must argue not with a Sunday School teacher or a local preacher but with St Paul and St Augustine, Aquinas and Ockham, Pascal and Newman.

We are asking neither for dogmatic arrogance nor for an emasculated and half-hearted denominational religion, but for a sceptical and rational criticism of the implicit assumptions of scepticism and rationalism themselves. We need an outlook that would emphasize the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum* no more heavily than the complementary *Amo ergo tu es*, and would admit that measurement, no matter how useful it may be in the sciences, is no more 'real' and no more fundamental than value. In short, we need a clear understanding of the nature and limitations of scientific method. It ought not to be very difficult to train teachers who would be thoroughly suited to their technical tasks in an industrial society but would nevertheless understand that the interpretation of value in terms of life, and life in terms of

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matter, is useful but not unique, and that the opposite approach is not only a necessity of any healthy outlook but also plays a part in the formation of scientific concepts themselves.

It may seem that even this is a great deal to ask, but it does not mean that everybody must make a serious study of philosophy. The average man has never heard of Kepler or Linnaeus, Lavoisier or Lamarck, but he is taught that science is a field of accurate experiment and strict reasoning. He admits his own limitations, he is duly suspicious of cranks and oddities, and at a pinch he knows someone who knows someone who knows better than he does. If we turned a little more attention to the task it would be possible to establish something of the same respect for authority and reason in other fields of knowledge. After all, the change in outlook that is needed is no greater than the change of outlook of the middle classes between 1880 and 1930, and it could be brought about by the same unobtrusive methods. The propagation of a new outlook depends not only on explicit teaching, but also on all the unofficial forces of education—on the one hand the newspapers, cinemas and advertisement hoardings, and on the other the student societies, the ‘progressive’ weeklies, and all the apparatus of protest and rebellion that naturally arouses the enthusiasm of alert and independent youth. The transition from a materialist and hedonistic view to one more healthy and more realistic would not be difficult if the journalists, the broadcasters and the film-producers would continue to develop their sense of professional responsibility, and if the leaders of ‘progressive’ forces were to realize how near they have come to fossilizing into a fighting attitude directed not against present dangers, but against dead or dying enemies.

## RELIGION AND THE NATIONAL PURPOSE

### *Religion and the National Purpose*

The price of any kind of freedom is the voluntary acceptance of responsibility. But a nation can be free, yet lacking in vitality. We need more than an intellectual understanding of the natural limits of freedom, and of the material, animal, and spiritual hierarchy ; we need a firm conviction of right and wrong and an irrepressible source of energy. It is not enough to see the advantages of a religious outlook and to understand that if we want happiness we must work as if we were aiming at something else. We must feel that we are indeed working for other ends, and that our ultimate aim is not what is profitable but what is right.

It may seem that all our arguments have themselves rested on the assumption that 'this doctrine is true because it works, and no other doctrine does'. The objection is sound, but no other basis of argument is possible. What is true does work, and nothing else does. If, in clarifying our own position, we are to make the minimum of assumptions, we are compelled to argue pragmatically. But the argument itself rests on the ultimate assumption that the individual life is significant, and on the undemonstrable obligation to use one's talents to the fullest extent. If these are denied, then the whole argument falls to the ground ; if they are admitted, then the pragmatic argument itself shows the need for something more than pragmatism. In one form or another, we find ourselves committed to the familiar paradox of religion, that whoever would save his life must lose it.

In the same way, a society or a nation that is to survive must feel that it is aiming at something more than its own survival and something more than the survival of the race. It must accept its moral standards as valuable in

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themselves; and the only standards that can be accepted in this way are those that are sanctioned by generations of experience. If those traditional standards are accepted as human approximations to an inaccessible truth, if they are felt to impose an absolute obligation that derives from a higher source than our own animal needs, there can be, in one sense, no success, for they can never be attained; in another, there need be no failure, for to aim at them and work for them even in the face of material failure is itself a success on a different level.

To feel that success on such a level counts, to feel that it transcends material success without reducing material success to unreality, and that it can redeem our own essential imperfection, is fundamentally a religious attitude. If we scrutinize it with enough care it gives a necessary meaning to ideas of eternity, of heaven, and of revelation and redemption, a meaning whose truth in any material or creaturely sense it cannot prove, but one that is not in conflict with other necessary truths. In our own time, we can hardly expect our society to become completely Christian; but we can reasonably expect the rationalist and the scientist to push their inquiries to the point at which they begin to see that the Christian terminology is one way of describing necessary truths, and to understand that a religious conviction of the reality of right and wrong is the only sure source of national vitality and the only practical alternative to the deification of the State. Today it ought to be clear, even to those who are reluctant to express their beliefs in the worn and yet vaguely pretentious words of a familiar religion, that an outlook which absolves the individual from any need for responsibility and humility, and offers flattering and consoling doctrines in place of stubborn fact, is itself one of the chief causes of the disillusion and loss of moral tension

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which Spengler and the fascists mistook for biological degeneration.

The decline in the birth-rate, the slackening of industrial progress, the set-backs of democracy, the disillusion of those who pinned their faith to material science, and the general loss of confidence in the values of our civilization, all these are as serious as the threat of any external power, and will not cure themselves; but they are not symptoms of some vast incurable disease. In part, they are the growing pains of our society, and in so far as they are evils, they can be cured. We need to restore the balance and proportion of our thought, to recognize that authority and tradition are no less valuable than experiment and scepticism, and to remember that the materialistic approach is only one of the approaches to the worlds of matter, life, and value, and is not the one that reveals significance and purpose. We need a firm conviction of a common purpose, a purpose that will include the material aims of the social reformer but will not be limited by national or personal selfishness. Democracy cannot be maintained except through the self-discipline, the hard determination, and concentration of energy that come from the recognition of religious truth. If we learn to value life, not for its own sake, nor for the sake of immediate satisfaction, but for the sake of virtues and values that are not of one time and place, then the arts and the sciences, the national economy and the birth-rate, will look after themselves.

